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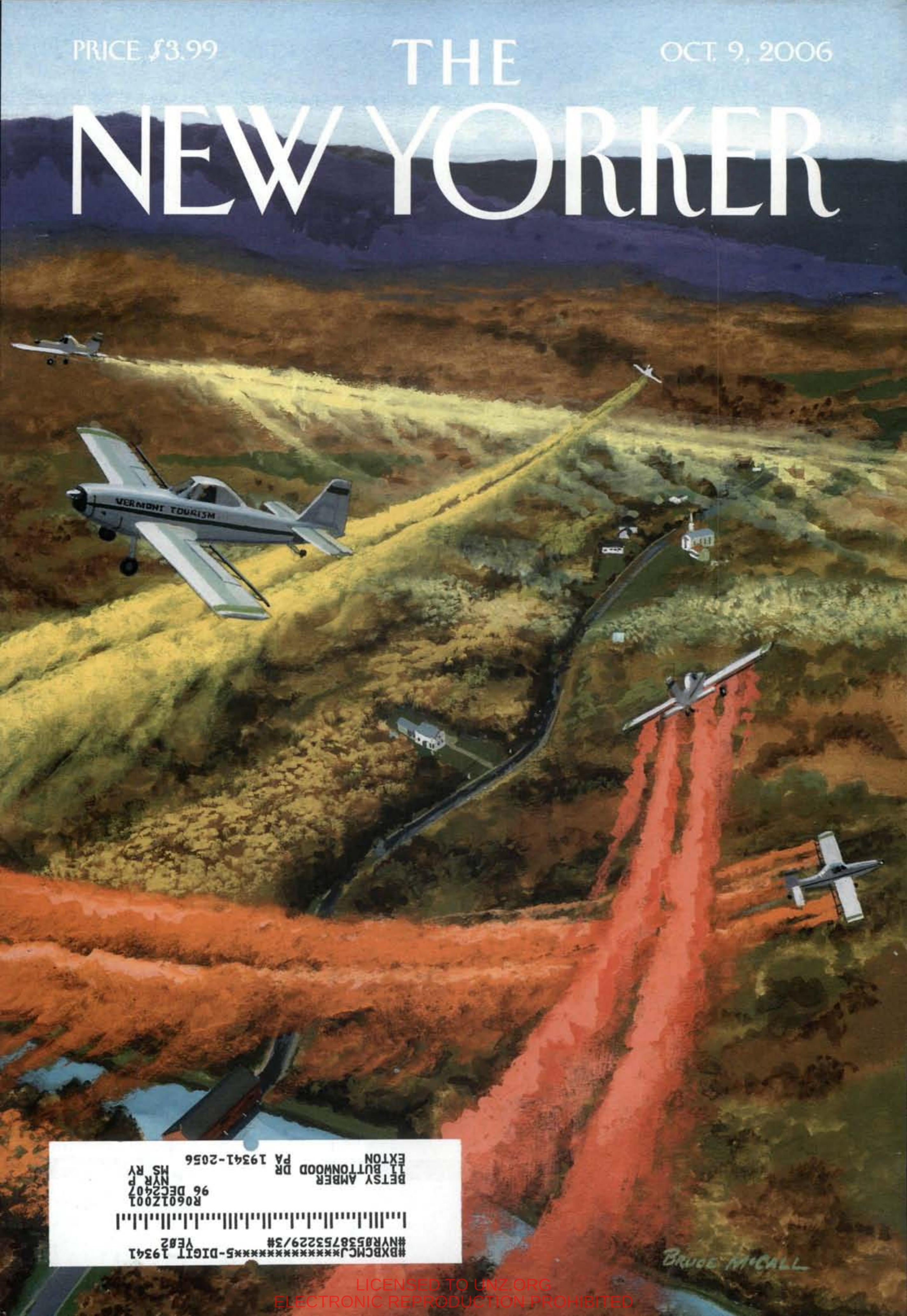
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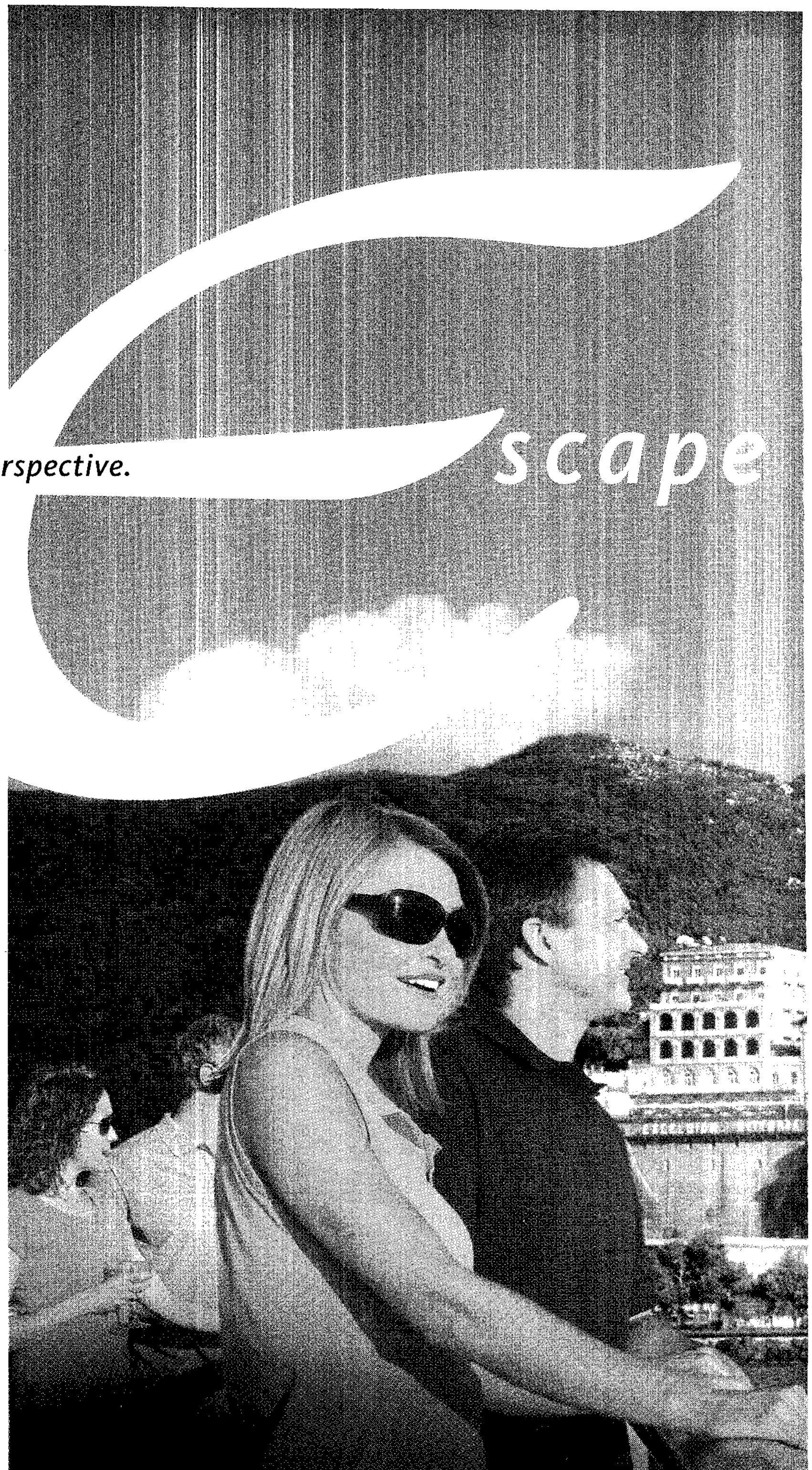

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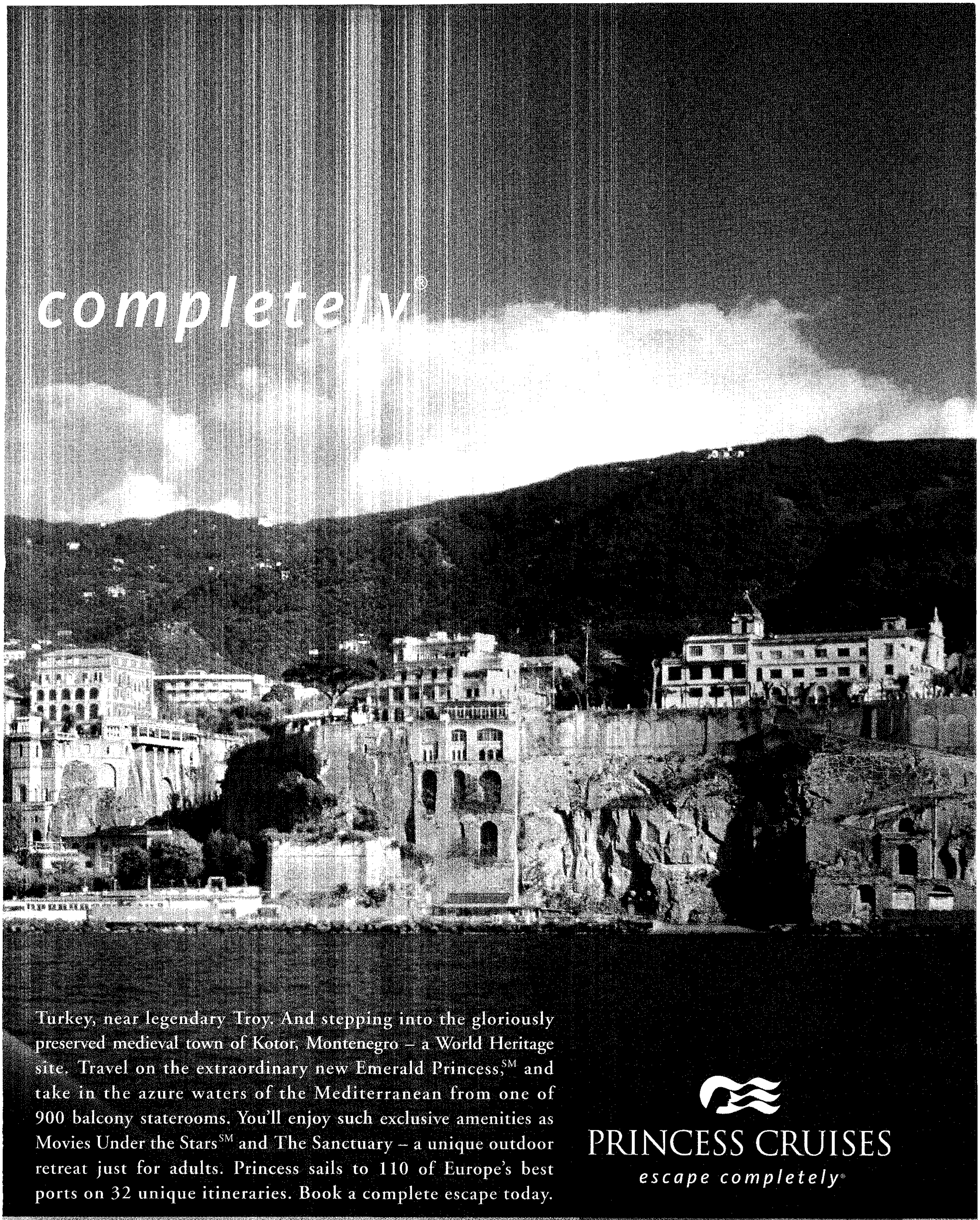

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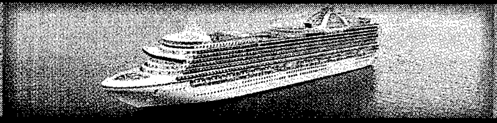

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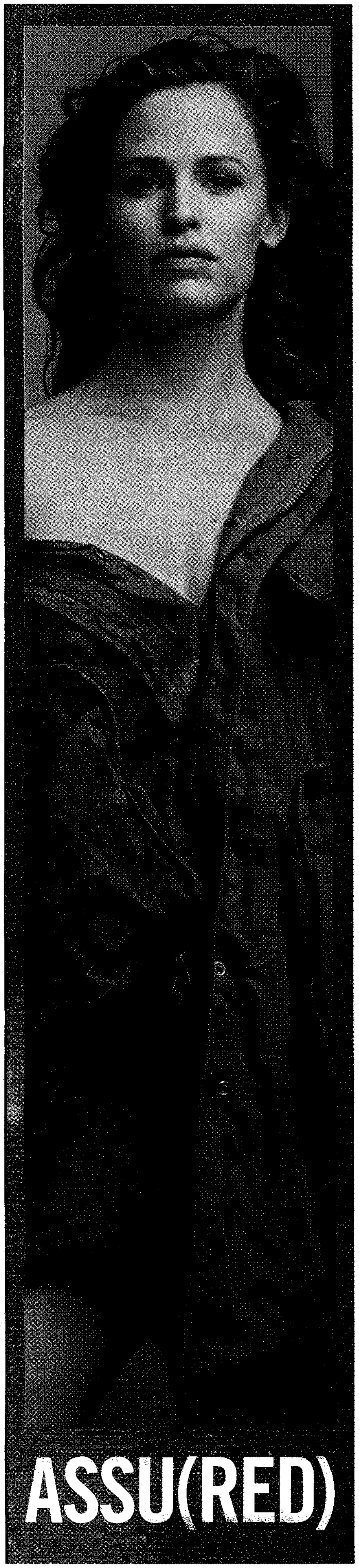

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Mark Singer (The Talk of the Town, p. 28; "Escaped," p. 46) is the author of five books, including "Character Studies: Encounters with the Curiously Obsessed," which is out in paperback.

Richard Preston ("Tall for Its Age," p. 32) will publish "The Wild Trees," a book about climbing in and exploring the world's tallest forests, in April.

George Packer (Comment, p. 27), a staff writer, is the author of "The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq," which is available in paperback.

John Ashbery (Poems, pp. 36, 64, 78) has published more than twenty collections of poems, including "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," for which he won a Pulitzer Prize. His new collection, "A Worldly Country," comes out in February.

Ian Frazier (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 38) will publish a collection of his humor essays next year.

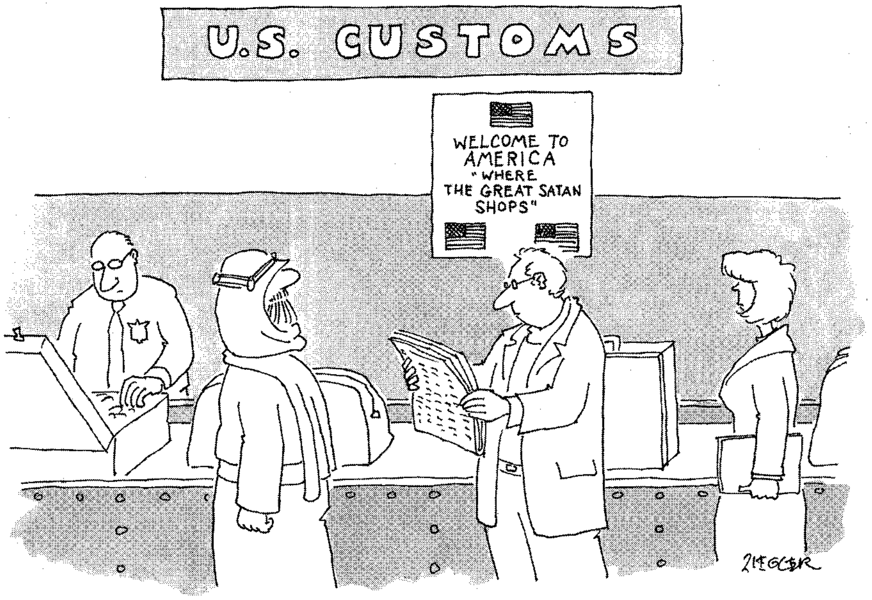
Milan Kundera ("What Is a Novelist?," p. 40) is a novelist and essayist. His new book of essays, "The Curtain," is due out in February.

Atul Gawande ("The Score," p. 58) is assistant professor of surgery at Harvard Medical School and the editor of "The Best American Science Writing 2006." His new book, "Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance," will be published in April.

Joyce Carol Oates (Fiction, p. 68) has published works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and literary criticism. "High Lonesome: Selected Stories 1966-2006," came out earlier this year.

Jill Lepore (Books, p. 76) is a professor of history at Harvard. Her book "New York Burning" is available in paperback.

Bruce McCall (Cover) is a regular contributor of art and humor pieces. ♦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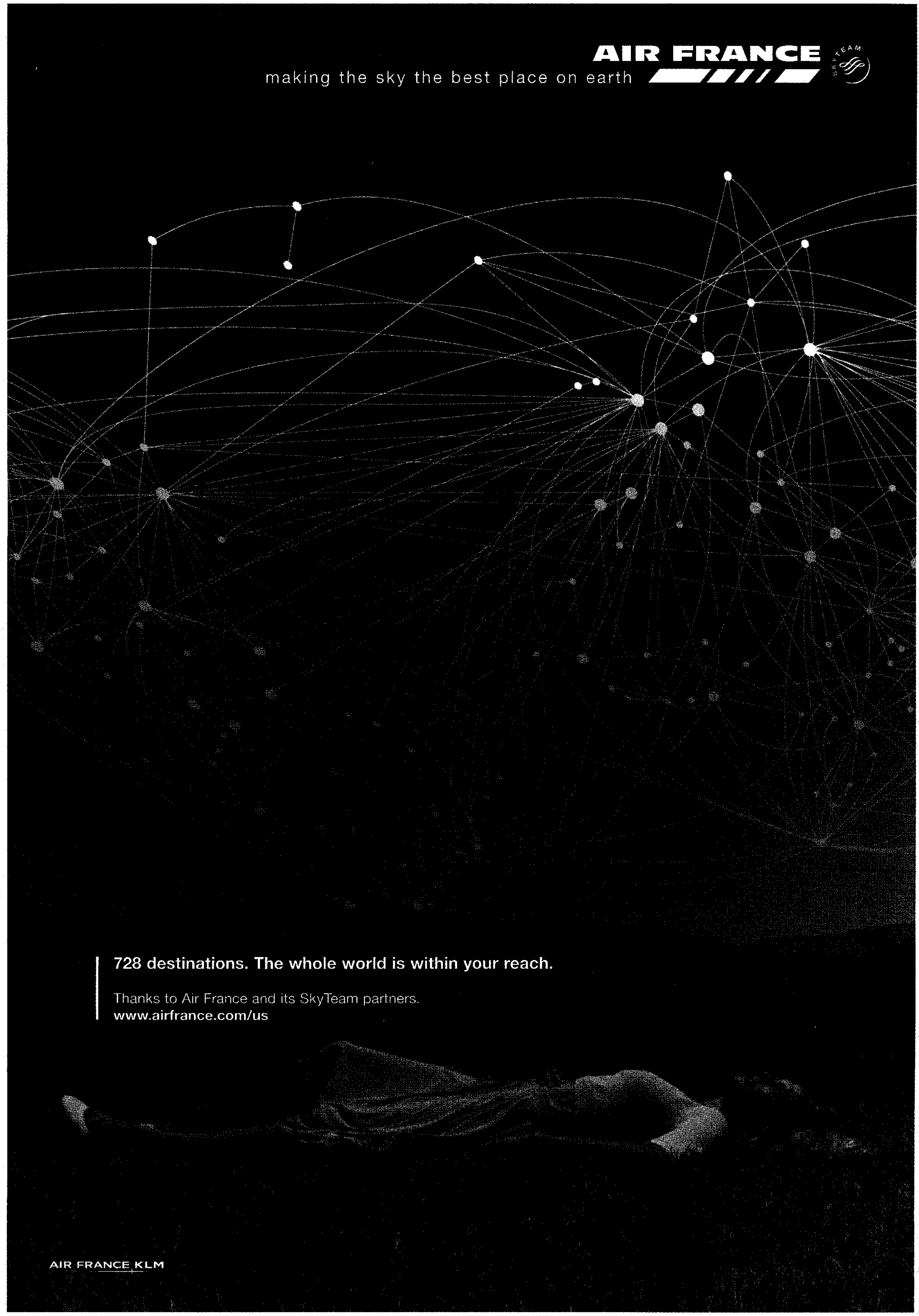

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THE KING'S COLLEGE

King Abdullah II of Jordan, instead of modelling his new school after Deerfield Academy, as Nick Paumgarten reports, could have looked to Iraq's King Faisal College for inspiration ("Deerfield in the Desert," September 4th). In the late nineteen-thirties, the Iraqi government, which was then also a Hashemite monarchy like Jordan, established this college, named after Iraq's King Faisal I, a granduncle of Abdullah's. Unlike the proposed King's Academy in Jordan, tuition and room and board at King Faisal's were free. Admission was based on academic performance, and students were selected from all parts of Iraq in proportion to the demographics of each province. The concept was egalitarian in nature and designed to bring the best and the brightest of Iraq's children together regardless of background. Although it closed in 1949, many of the school's graduates went on to become part of an educated and professional class of Iraqis that was instrumental in developing Iraq over the next three decades. Given Jordan's needs, and the political, social, and religious turmoil there and in the whole region, a new academy based on pure scholastic merit rather than on wealth and social standing might be more useful in wielding a moderating influence.

Amin Yousif
Vienna, Va.

ATHLETIC ENDEAVORS

Peter J. Boyer, in his narrative of the Duke lacrosse scandal, repeatedly uses the word "boys" to refer to members of the men's lacrosse team: "The boys had no legal representation"; "She was able to pick out a few faces of boys whom she remembered seeing at the party" ("Big Men on Campus," September 4th). College students may be prone to youthful excess, but as adults they are legally and morally responsible for their behavior. Regarding them as children rather than as young men and women makes it easy to diminish serious criminal or ethical infractions as nothing more than the poor judgment of youth: "boys will be boys" is followed by a shrug.

Brook J. Sadler
Assistant Professor of Philosophy
University of South Florida
Tampa, Fla.

Richard Brodhead, Duke's president, attempts an apologia for big-time college sports by invoking Odysseus as an "image of excellence." But another reading of Odysseus shows him to be a manipulative, self-aggrandizing liar, a deceitful opportunist, and a thief. He never stands up to the incompetent leadership of Agamemnon, he spends years in alcohol and dissipation, and what passes for his personal courage is, more often than not, just egotistical recklessness that leads to the death of his own men (which he is always quick to blame on someone else). Maybe Odysseus does have a lot in common with big-time college sports after all.

Robert J. O'Hara
Fitchburg, Mass.

Boyer writes that "Duke means to contend at a championship level in sports across the board, and to do so without compromising academic standards. It is an audacious proposition—only two other private institutions, Stanford and Northwestern, even try it." Both Notre Dame and Boston College are also regularly cited by the N.C.A.A., the American Football Coaches Association, and other groups for their consistent commitment to athletics and academics. Boston College and Notre Dame share the honor with Northwestern and Duke of being the schools most frequently commended for having the highest graduation rate in football.

Robert B. Vanasse
Washington, D.C.

•

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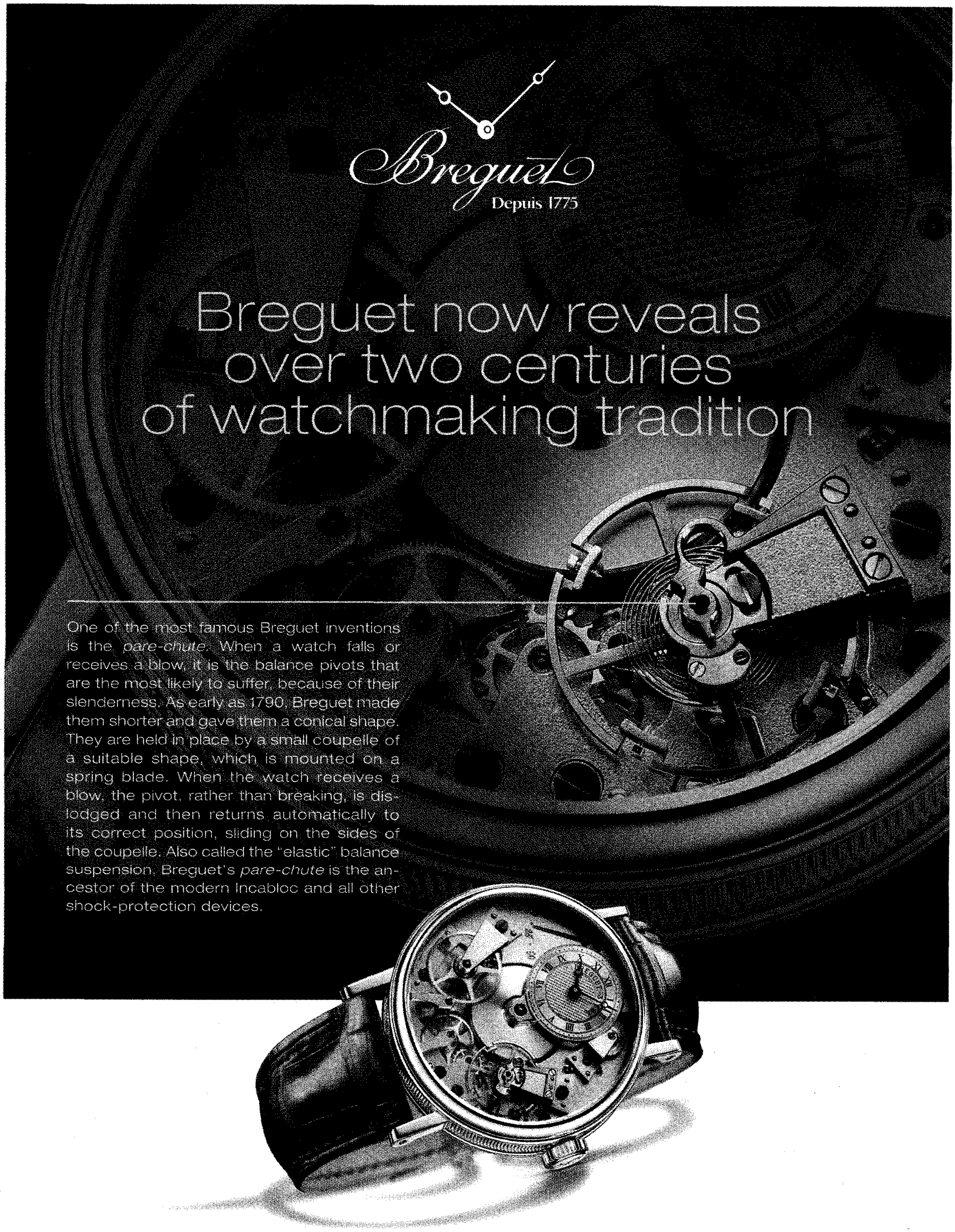
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A rehearsal for Carl Hancock Rux's "Mycenaean," at BAM. *Photograph by Gus Powell.*

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
8	9	10	4	5	6	7

THIS WEEK

NIGHT LIFE
WORLD-BEATERS

New York City's Brazilian Girls, none of whom are Brazilian (the members are from Italy, Argentina, and the U.S.) and only one of whom is female, celebrate the release of their second album of global electro-pop, "Talk to La Bomb," with a show at Webster Hall. (See page 14.)

ART
WILLING AND ABLE

Music fans may know the German painter Albert Oehlen from his work with the long-running psychedelic-pop band Red Crayola, but his large-scale canvases are in the spotlight this week at the Luhring Augustine gallery. Their bright palette and casual impressiveness reinforce his position as a versatile virtuoso. (See page 16.)

DANCE
REICH AT SEVENTY

Many choreographers have found inspiration in the minimalist composer Steve Reich's repetitive and overlapping figures. In celebration of his seventieth birthday, BAM presents two. The intense Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker came into her own in 1982 with "Fase," a set of solos and duets set to early Reich works for pianos, violins, human speech, and clapping hands. And the wunderkind of contemporary kathak, Akram Khan, has made a dance to a new work by the birthday boy. (See page 16.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
PARIS MATCH

Wendy Wasserstein's English-language version of Lehár's operetta "The Merry Widow," at Dicapo Opera Theatre, should bring some Upper West Side attitude to the work's elegant, fin-de-siècle Parisian milieu. (See page 18.)

MOVIES
THE DOCTOR IS IN

Though Dr. Seuss's stories seem inseparable from his illustrations, they have been adapted for such cherished cartoons as "Horton Hatches the Egg" and "How the Grinch Stole Christmas." IFC Center will show these and other Seuss-based animations, including George Pal's "Puppetoon" versions of "And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street" and "The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins." (See page 23.)

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ARMS AND THE MAN
At the Pearl, George Bernard Shaw's 1894 satire, about a young girl who romanticizes war. In previews. Opens Oct. 8. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

BLUE DOOR
Leigh Silverman directs Tanya Barfield's drama, about a black mathematician who is visited by the ghosts of his ancestors. In previews. Opens Oct. 8. (Peter Jay Sharp, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

BUTLEY
Nathan Lane stars as a literature professor with a personal crisis, in Simon Gray's dark comedy from 1972. Nicholas Martin directs. Previews begin Oct. 5. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

A CHORUS LINE
A revival of the 1975 musical conceived by Michael Bennett, about twenty-four aspirants for eight spots in the chorus of a Broadway show. With music by Marvin Hamlisch and lyrics by Edward Kleban. Bob Avian directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 5. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE CLEAN HOUSE
A new play by Sarah Ruhl, about a high-powered doctor (Blair Brown) whose housekeeper prefers telling jokes to cleaning the apartment. With Jill Clayburgh. Previews begin Oct. 5. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

ELLIOT, A SOLDIER'S FUGUE
Quiara Alegría Hudes's drama about a soldier's return from Iraq has a limited return engagement at El Museo del Barrio. Previews begin Oct. 6. (Fifth Ave. at 104th St. 212-279-4200.)

EMERGENCE-SEE!
Daniel Beaty portrays forty characters in his new one-man play, in which a modern-day slave ship appears in the Hudson River in front of the Statue of Liberty. Previews begin Oct. 10. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

EVIL DEAD THE MUSICAL
Hinton Battle and Christopher Bond direct this campy musical adaptation of Sam Raimi's horror-film franchise. In previews. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

GREY GARDENS
Christine Ebersole and Mary Louise Wilson star in Doug Wright's musical based on the 1975 Maysles-brothers documentary about Edith Bouvier Beale and her daughter, Little Edie, the reclusive aunt and cousin, respectively, of Jackie Kennedy. In previews. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

HEARTBREAK HOUSE
Roundabout Theatre Company opens its season with George Bernard Shaw's romantic drama from 1920, set on an English country estate. Starring Philip Bosco, Swoosie Kurtz, Byron Jennings, Lily Rabe, and Laila Robins. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

HELL HOUSE
Les Freres Corbusier and a company of nearly a hundred present their version of the evangelical-Christian take on the haunted house, in which abortions, homosexuality, and other sins alleged to damn one to Hell are enacted. In previews. Opens Oct. 10. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St. 718-254-8779.)

KING LEAR
Classical Theatre of Harlem mounts Shakespeare's tragedy, directed by Alfred Preisser and starring André De Shields. In previews. Opens Oct. 6. (H.S.A., 647 St. Nicholas Ave. 212-868-4444.)

LOSING LOUIE
Matthew Arkin and Scott Cohen star in the U.S. première of Simon Mendes da Costa's comedy, a portrait of two generations, fifty years apart. Jerry Zaks directs. In previews. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

MYCENAEAN
Carl Hancock Rux brings his theatre piece based on his novel "Asphalt" and his epic poem "Mycenae," which explores the cyclical nature of history. Oct. 10-14. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

MY NAME IS RACHEL CORRIE
The American première of a play created from the diaries and letters of the American activist who was killed by an Israeli bulldozer in Gaza. Alan Rickman, who edited Corrie's writings with Katharine Viner, directs. Previews begin Oct. 5. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100.)

NIXON'S NIXON
MCC Theatre presents Russell Lees's play, which imagines a conversation between Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger the night that Nixon resigned from the Presidency. Directed by Jim Simpson. Opens Oct. 4. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE
Cynthia Nixon stars as an outspoken teacher in a Scottish girls' school in the nineteen-thirties, in this play adapted from the Muriel Spark novel, produced by the New Group. Scott Elliott directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 9. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

SOUTHERN COMFORTS
Primary Stages presents this drama, in which a widow and a widower fall in love during their golden years. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER
This play by Ariel Dorfman, based on the book by Kerry Kennedy, details the plights of more than fifty human-rights activists. Terry Kinney directs. Opens Oct. 8. (Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'
Twyla Tharp conceived, directed, and choreographed this jukebox musical set to the music of Bob Dylan. In previews. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

WRECKS
Ed Harris stars in the U.S. première of Neil LaBute's latest play, about a Midwestern man who has just lost his wife. Directed by LaBute. In previews. Opens Oct. 10. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

NOW PLAYING

BIRTH AND AFTER BIRTH
Atlantic Theatre Company presents the New York première of Tina Howe's comedy, about overachieving parents trying to impress a childless anthropologist couple with their four-year-old's birthday party. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

JAY JOHNSON: THE TWO AND ONLY
The veteran ventriloquist and ex-"Soap" star Johnson portrays an array of characters, among them a monkey and a tennis ball, in this production, which originated at the Atlantic Theatre Company. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

JOHN FERGUSON
Mint Theatre Company revives St. John Ervine's play from 1919, about an Irish farmer who needs a miracle. Martin Platt directs. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

LEMKIN'S HOUSE
The obsessive protagonist of Catherine Filloux's drama dies at the beginning of the play, but never mind. Raphael Lemkin (John Daggett) isn't ready to let the mere fact of a heart attack end his lifelong quest for justice. A single-minded refugee lawyer who coined the term "genocide" after his family perished in the Holocaust, Lemkin emigrated to the U.S. and lobbied Congress to have ethnic murder declared an international crime. Filloux gives him a posthumous role—to witness the subsequent tide of genocide as it deposits ravaged eyewitnesses from around the globe in his study. While the play succeeds only sporadically, the supporting cast members register strong performances

CAN A TANK TOP
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in a series of brief roles. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-352-3101. Through Oct. 8.)

MACHIAVELLI
Richard Vetere's commedia-influenced take on Machiavelli, portrayed here in his years of exile from Florence, brings to mind a skit performed by a high-school faculty in the hope of making history fun. It doesn't, really. In the title role, James Wetzel resembles not so much a formidable political craftsman as someone's schlubby uncle, and Liza Vann puts a histrionic Katharine Hepburn spin on Machiavelli's wife, to grating effect. As a hot-tempered Lorenzo de Medici, Jason Howard fares best by embracing fully the cartoonishness of the script. (ArcLight, 152 W. 71st St. 212-239-6200.)

THE PAIN AND THE ITCH
Set in the Ikea-furnished home of Clay (Christopher Evan Welch) and Kelly (Mia Barron), a thirty-something couple who can barely stand each other, Bruce Norris's play is as much about Clay and Kelly's manipulations and prejudices as it is about their misguided perception of themselves: that they're liberal and thus compassionate. Nonsense. Hatred and barely suppressed anger fill every line that every character speaks—beautifully. Anna D. Shapiro has directed "The Pain and the Itch" so well that you hardly notice her work. You are aware, instead, of the play's fundamental elegance. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/2/06.) (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

RICHARD II
In Brian Kulick's imaginative staging, Richard (Michael Cumpsty), after sending his adversaries away, is seen living it up with his wife (the lovely Doan Ly), grooving to music in the Rudy Vallée vein—the production is set sometime in the twentieth century. Richard is not part of the drama until he transforms from spoiled monarch to indigent poet. In soliloquies of breathtaking angst that Cumpsty fully inhabits, Richard becomes more human, thanks primarily to Cumpsty's performance. He somehow manages to knit together the two halves of Shakespeare's discordant, ultimately minor work, and he makes us see the wonder and the sadness of coming to realize too much too late. (10/2/06) (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

SONGS OF THE DRAGONS FLYING TO HEAVEN
Young Jean Lee's jagged, open-ended play takes the Sarah Silverman approach to Asian identity, cuing uncomfortable laughter—and much of it—with its savage-witted pronouncements on race and racism. A self-loathing Korean-American (the expertly deadpan Becky Yamamoto) tells us blankly that her immigrant parents are akin to "retarded monkeys," and goes on to explain that "some white men who like Asian women seem to like this retarded quality." Eventually, she comes around and joins up with a trio of women from the Far East, who somersault around the stage and perform hara-kiri in pantomime for kicks. In its maniacal way, the show serves as a mirror of ethnic identity itself: awkward, perplexing, and full of odd, irreconcilable juxtapositions. (HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave. 212-352-3101.)

SUBURBIA
Second Stage Theatre begins its season with a revival of Eric Bogosian's 1994 play. (Reviewed in this issue.) (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **ESOTERICA:** DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING:** Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NO CHILD . . . :** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **SEVEN GUITARS:** Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. **THE TREATMENT:** Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100. **THE WEDDING SINGER:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BAM CAFÉ
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—Oct. 6: The local theatrical glam-rock group the **Fabulous Entourage.**

"BANJAXED! THE GREAT IRISH TENOR BANJO CONCERT"
Oct. 6: The four-string banjo, a staple of traditional Irish music, takes center stage as **Mick Moloney**, a noted player, professor, and raconteur, joins **Seamus Egan**, of the band Solas, and a long list of musicians, including **Darren Maloney**, the brothers **Pio** and **Donie Ryan**, **Eamon O'Leary**, **Frankie McCormick**, **Dessie Groarke**, and **Don Meade.** They'll be accompanied by the all-Ireland accordion champion **Jimmy Keane** and the vocalist **Susan McKeown**, along with other instrumentalists and singers. (Moravian Church, Lexington Ave. at 30th St. For more information, call 212-998-3950.)

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Oct. 4: Three years ago, the local reggae collective **Easy Star All-Stars** released "Dub Side of the Moon," a clever interpretation of Pink Floyd's classic album "Dark Side of the Moon." The group recently applied its magic to Radiohead's "OK Computer" on a record titled "Radiodread."

HAMMERSTEIN BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 9: Hailing from the decidedly ungothic realm of Little Rock, **Evanescence** is nonetheless a favorite of the nation's black-clad teens. Its 2003 album, "Fallen," which combined the earnest histrionics of Tori Amos with the guitar-based heft of nu-metal and a stubborn dose of Christian rock, vaulted up the pop charts. The band is back with a new album, "The Open Door," offering more sonic brawn and delicate balladry.

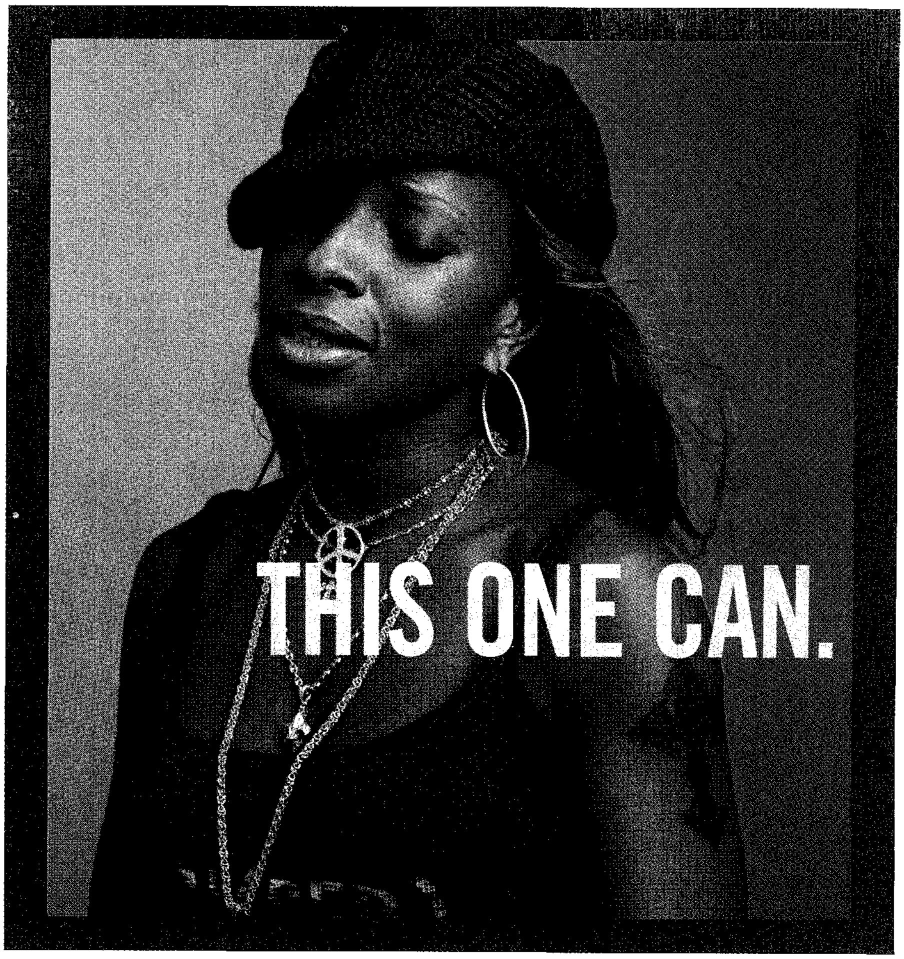
IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Oct. 4-6: The introspective post-punk of Doug Martsch's **Built to Spill.** Oct. 10-11 and Oct. 13: Orange County's **Social Distortion** started out as one of the original bands in Southern California's late-seventies punk scene; its début album, "Mommy's Little Monster," is roundly hailed as a classic. Later on, the group added elements of roots rock, country, and rockabilly to its sound, which is anchored by Mike Ness's adenoidal vocals.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Oct. 5-7: The loose-knit ensemble the **Loser's Lounge** pays tongue-in-cheek tribute to the Talking Heads.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—Oct. 7: The **Envelopes**, a five-piece band from Sweden, traffics in heart-quickening pop.

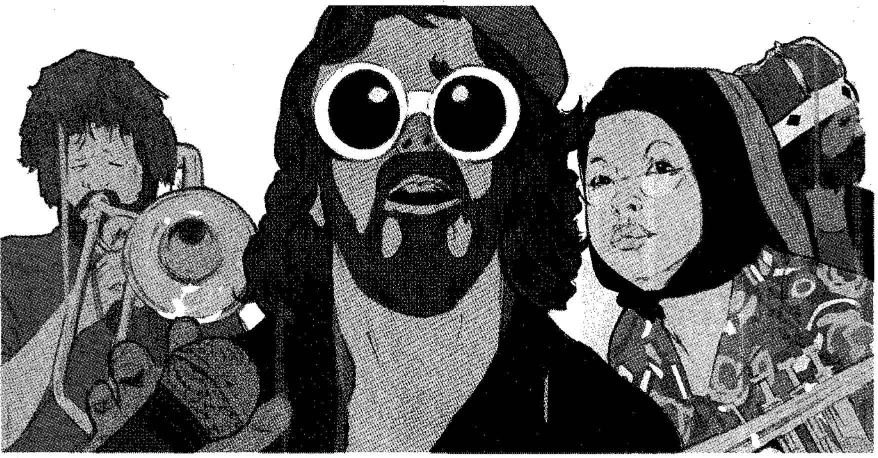
MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Oct. 7: The alternative quartet **Harvey Danger** burst out of Seattle in the mid-nineties; ignoring the grunge scene of the day, they opted instead for a brainy brand of verbose pop-punk. The approach paid off nicely: their anthemic single "Flagpole Sitta" became a huge hit in 1998.

MO PITKIN'S HOUSE OF SATISFACTION
34 Ave. A, between 2nd and 3rd Sts. (212-777-5660)—Oct. 5: The **Chandler Travis Philharmonic.** The irreverent guitarist, singer, and composer Travis, who lives on Cape Cod and has been known to perform barefoot and in his pajamas, makes a rare New York City appearance with a slightly scaled-down version of his big band. Travis has


THIS ONE CAN.

been in show biz for nearly four decades. For years, beginning in the seventies, he co-led the musical act that opened for George Carlin on his tours. His other band, the Incredible Casuals, got its start in the eighties and is a fixture on the New England music scene. It's been more than five years since he last came to town, and he's gearing up for a long night of playful original songs that mix mind-bending wordplay with Dixieland jazz, shimmering rock, and horn-fuelled R. & B.

ROSELAND
239 W. 52nd St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 3-5: The flagship band of the trip-hop movement during the nineties, **Massive Attack** specializes in sombre but groovy music that brings an alternately sexy and spooky twilight-zone atmosphere to the dance floor.



The Chandler Travis Philharmonic, at Mo Pitkin's House of Satisfaction.

RACHEL DOMM

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—New York's own **Brazilian Girls** mix everything from reggae rhythms to thumping dance beats into incessantly catchy songs worthy of repeated late-night playing. The quartet came together a few years ago, with regular shows at the East Village club Nublu, but they have since outgrown that space. Last year, their self-titled début album was a hit on the electronica charts. On Oct. 5, they celebrate the release of a follow-up album, "Talk to La Bomb." Oct. 6-7: The U.K. folk-pop sensation **KT Tunstall.** With **Kevin Devine,** a local mop-topped singer-songwriter who dresses up his heartrending confessions with smart lyrics. Oct. 10-11: **Basement Jaxx** is Felix Buxton and Simon Ratcliffe, a pair of British producers who make propulsive dance music and have a savvy ear for pop accessibility. The latest venture to exhibit their kitchen-sink aesthetic is the album "Crazy Itch Radio."

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—Oct. 9 and Oct. 16: The Paris-based band **Les Primitifs du Futur,** which was founded twenty years ago by the guitarist and composer Dominic Cravic and the reclusive cartoonist R. Crumb (who plays banjo and mandolin, creates the cover art for their albums, and rarely performs in public). The music, composed by Cravic, pays tribute to the French musette and combines elements of jazz *manouche* (thanks to Cravic's Django-like guitar work), swing, and blues with various international dance styles.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Oct. 3-7: The **Kenny Garrett** quartet. On his new album, "Beyond the Wall," the commanding saxophonist explores the links between Asian musical forms and Coltrane-era modal jazz.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Oct. 3-8: The accomplished bassist **Christian McBride** makes room on the bandstand for **Dee Dee Bridgewater,** a singer whose interpretive smarts match her passionate delivery, for a salute to the late bassist Ray Brown.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through Nov. 11: The Broadway veteran **Elaine Stritch.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Oct. 4-8: **Freddy Cole's** seventy-fifth-birthday celebration. One of the finest male jazz singers of his generation has found a place for himself in the vocal pantheon, out of reach of his brother Nat's long shadow.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Oct. 3-14: Keen intelligence, effervescent phrasing, and a healthy sense of humor give the singer **Stacey Kent** an edge. Her sweet interaction with her band's saxophonist—her husband, **Jim Tomlinson**—adds to the fun.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Oct. 5-8: The lite-tropical jazz of **Gato Barbieri's** albums of the past few decades may not appeal to those enamored of the slashing free-jazz improvisations of his earlier Argentinean fusion work, but the tenor saxophonist's suave and sensuous tone provides its own rewards. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Oct. 5-8: "Braggtown," the new album by the **Branford Marsalis** quartet, exhibits the rapport he's established with his longtime bandmates, including the galvanic drummer **Jeff (Tain) Watts.** But concision has never been a key factor in Marsalis's aesthetic, and the rampaging virtuosity of this unit can often border on the relentless.

MERKIN CONCERT HALL
129 W. 67th St. (212-501-3330)—Oct. 9: The highly touted young pianist **Robert Glasper** performs duets with two instrumentalists who share his inclusive tastes, the guitarist **Lionel Loueke** and the electric bassist **Meshell Ndegéocello.**

ROULETTE
20 Greene St., between Canal and Grand Sts. (212-219-8242)—Oct. 6: The pianist **Gordon Beeferman** and the percussionist **Jeff Arnal** create tightly knit improvisations that range from the angular to the pastoral.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Oct. 3-8: The **Kurt Rosenwinkel Group.** The guitarist Rosenwinkel performs best in the presence of his steady partner, the saxophonist **Mark Turner,** an uncommon player who shares his ability to blend the cerebral and the lyrical. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde."** The Parisian gallerist Vollard (1866-1939) was an early champion of Matisse, Bonnard, van Gogh, Gauguin, Derain, and many others; this unusually canted show comprises samples of the work that they made under his encouragement and patronage. The two giants of the show's title are represented with canvases from solo shows that Vollard mounted in 1895 and 1901, respectively. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"New Orleans After the Flood: Photographs by Robert Polidori."** Through Dec. 10. ♦ **"Cai Guo-Qiang on the Roof: Transparent Monument."** Through Oct. 29. ♦ **"Rembrandt and His Circle: Drawings and Prints."** Through Oct. 15. ♦ **"Set in Stone: The Face in Medieval Sculpture."** More than eighty portrait heads in gilded silver, marble, limestone, and painted wood. Through Feb. 19. ♦ **"Sean Scully: Wall of Light."** Through Jan. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Projects 83: Monika Sosnowska."** Sosnowska has torn a jagged gash between the museum's second and third levels for viewers to peer through, up into a white-walled space; the floor below is littered with plasticky shards. As an art work, "The Hole" is more a one-liner than a revolutionary gesture, but it's still fun to see Yoshio Taniguchi's precious übermodern temple punctured, just a tiny bit, for the sake of art. Through Nov. 27. ♦ **"New Photography 2006: Jonathan Monk, Barbara Probst, Jules Spinatsch."** Through Jan. 8. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Zaha Hadid."** Through Oct. 25. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Picasso and American Art"** looks at the Spanish artist's influence on Americans from Stuart Davis and Jackson Pollock to John Graham and Andy Warhol. Through Jan. 28. ♦ Like Sol LeWitts funked up to represent an age of overwhelming techno-competence, **Mark Grotjahn's** drawings are geometric and regular, but they still have room for gestural flourishes. Eight large works in pencil focus on a recurring, off-kilter double fan shape, which shoots from multiple points on a central spine. Two drawings anchor the room with a saturated palette of reds and yellows, while the rest play with various gray scales. The slight asymmetries, along with smirches, scuffs, and visible pencil lines, admit a bit of ghost into the machine, bending mathematical accuracy toward the psychedelic. Through Jan. 7. ♦ Much of **"Full House,"** the Whitney's seventy-fifth-anniversary extravaganza, remains open into the fall, including the Pop art on the third floor (through Oct. 8), the Abstract Expressionism on the second floor (through Oct. 15), and the magnificent display of the works of Edward Hopper on the fifth floor (through Dec. 3). ♦ In honor of Steve Reich's seventieth birthday, **"Three Tales,"** a sound-and-video work that he made with Beryl Korot, will be on view Oct. 4-15. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Gustav Klimt: Five Paintings from the Collection of Ferdinand and Adele Bloch-Bauer"** includes the 1907 gold-and-silver-laced portrait of Adele, which will be joining the Neue Galerie's permanent collection. Through Oct. 9. (Open Thursdays and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

JOE COLEMAN
Coleman's devotional paintings depict eccentric and dangerous personages and their satellite worlds of collaborators, conspirators, and victims. Leo Gorcey, for instance, was an actor in the nineteen-thirties screen gang the Dead End Kids; Gertrude Baniszewski was accused of torturing a young woman in Indiana; and the sixteenth-century aristocrat Carlo Gesualdo was both a composer and a murderer. Coleman draws his subjects in a contemporary comic-book idiom, then illuminates them with spotlights in a gallery that has been darkened like a chapel. The grotesquery and precision of the paintings recalls the convoluted allegories of Hieronymus Bosch. An installation of curiosities—religious statuary, autopsy photographs, severed-head sculptures—completes the impression of a world in which art and horror are indelibly linked. Through Oct. 4. (Tilton, 8 E. 76th St. 212-737-2221.)

"ANDY WARHOL: MAO"
"Even when the subject is different, people paint the same painting," Warhol once declared. Here, the inverse is true. The repeated subject is Chairman Mao, copied from a single propaganda photograph and silk-screened onto canvases of different sizes. A variety of treatments are employed, including some surprisingly gestural ones recalling Abstract Expressionism. Even for viewers weary of Warhol, for whom the dead-celebrity icons have lost their kick, there's something wonderfully perverse about the archetypal capitalist artist painting the notorious Communist leader (and in the early seventies, right after Nixon's visit to China). In this case, the subject is different from Jackie or Marilyn or Elvis, but one thing central to Warhol's œuvre remains the same: the power of fame and its dependence on images. Through Oct. 7. (L & M Arts, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020.)

Short List

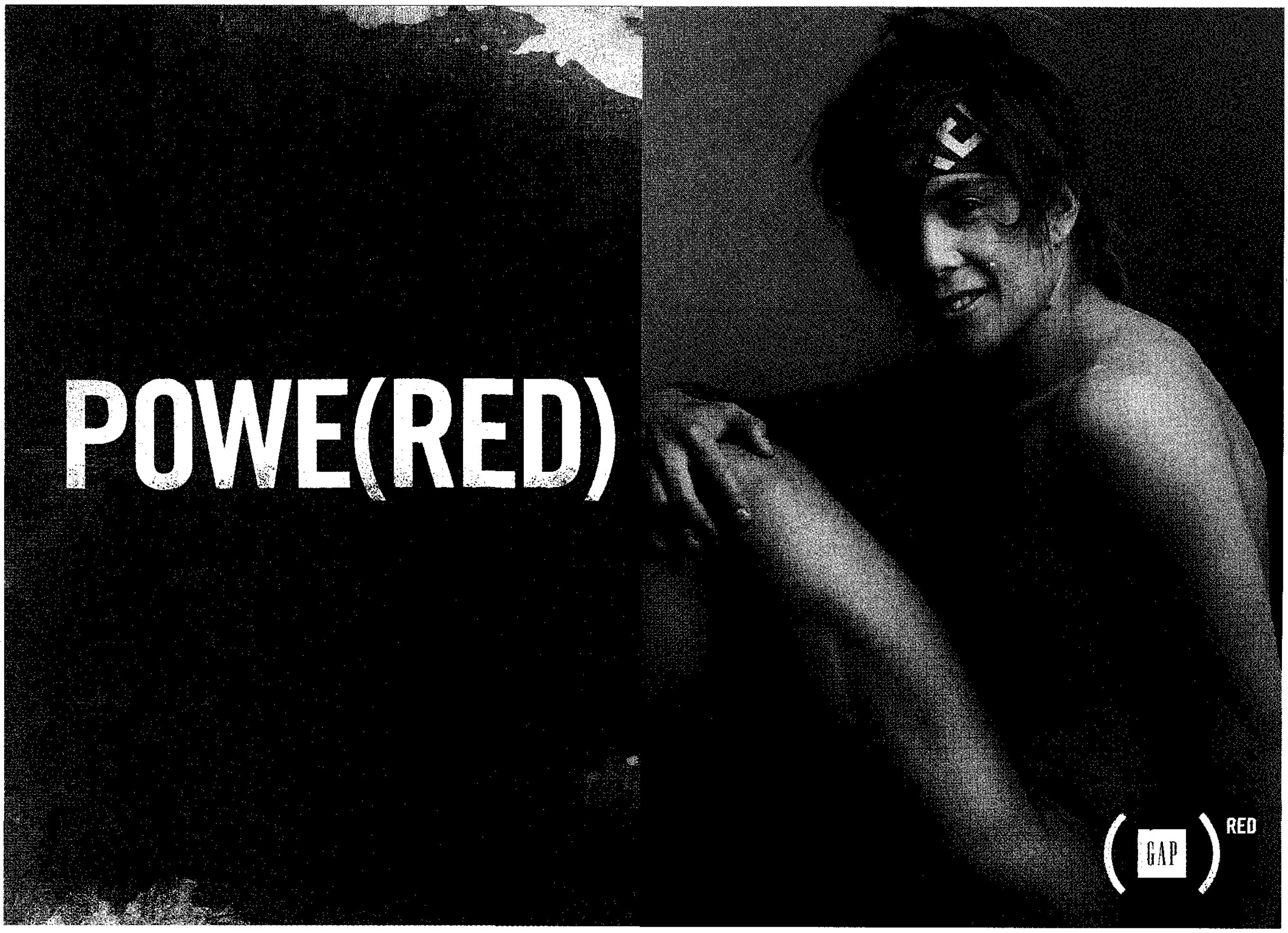
ELINOR CARUCCI: Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070. Through Oct. 21. **WALKER EVANS:** UBS, 1285 Sixth Ave. 212-713-2885. Through Nov. 17. **ANISH KAPOOR:** Public Art Fund, Rockefeller Center, Fifth Ave. at 50th St. 212-980-4575. Through Oct. 27. **ANNETTE MESSAGER / YANG FUDONG:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Oct. 14. **GIORGIO MORANDI:** Thiebaud, 42 E. 76th St. 212-737-9759. Through Oct. 28. **FRANZ ROH:** Ubu, 416 E. 59th St. 212-753-4444. Through Dec. 22. **"VASELINE MUSES":** Skarstedt, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-737-2060. Through Oct. 14.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ERIK BENSON / AUGUSTO ARBIZO
One might venture to identify an emerging phenomenon among young painters, in which old-fashioned color-field abstraction merges with a dystopic, Popish interest in the junky emptiness of highway on-ramps, strip malls, and corporate office parks. The idea stands or falls on the depth of engagement with the painted surface, and Benson is a good example of its success. His layered acrylic canvases start with splotches of paint laid onto glass; these are peeled up and collaged into works with a jigsawlike density, a gloomy/garish palette, and a keen sense of line. The compositions manage to express humor, loathing, and curiosity all at once. In the small gallery, Arbizo shows hot-paletted, Rorschach-style paintings. Through Oct. 14. (Roebling Hall, 606 W. 26th St. 212-929-8180.)

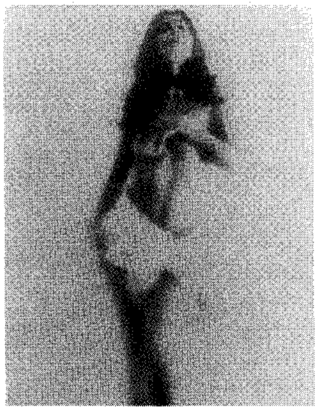
MARTIN BOROWSKI
In these handsome paintings of museum interiors, right angles parcel the picture planes into boxes and rectangles that lend them a Donald Judd-ish formalism. The airy scenes have a high-lonesome feel, a bit like time has stopped, despite the presence of opened books or pieces of art or even people in motion. Borowski declines to turn his museums (most of which are unrecognizable, except in the case of one image that traces the Guggenheim's curved ramp) into temples of art; instead, he regards them with the same wary, cool eye that he has brought to airport waiting areas and offices and underpatronized stores in the past, seeing them as largely blank sites pregnant with the potential for contemplation or even revelation. Through Nov. 4. (Holm, 524 W. 24th St. 212-627-7444.)

BARNABY FURNAS
Emaciated rock-star Jesuses, gigantic bloody Red Seas, and pustular, pig-faced men in suits populate Furnas's new paintings. As with his previous efforts, the works here center on the paint drip as sanguinary splatter, though this time he has not only increased the scale but added a Day-Glo resist technique, irregularly stretched calfskin canvases, and watercolors burned clean through with brown-edged holes. The genuine rage that animated Furnas's previous work is not so much tempered as hobbled by all the formal experimentation. But ambitious technical ventures, like impassioned iconography, are at least partially their own reward. Through Oct. 21. (Boesky, 509 W. 24th St. 212-680-9889.)



CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
NO-NAME GAME

The twenty-six small black-and-white photographs gathered at the Skarstedt gallery under the title "Vaseline Muses" include pictures of female artists and performers at their most provocative: Lynda Benglis flaunting an enormous dildo, Carolee Schneemann pulling a paper scroll from her vagina, Karen Finley ranting through a rain of debris. Images of these and other avant-garde troublemakers—many feminist icons, all nude—were appropriated from magazines or books and rephotographed through a mock-romantic haze of Vaseline by an artist who would prefer to remain anonymous. As early gallery announcements revealed, he's Mike Kelley, the Los Angeles iconoclast, who first showed this work in Germany in 1991. Kelley might have anticipated Thomas Ruff's blurred porn photographs, but his radical muses have a more outrageous erotic power. An unsigned press release suggests that the artist was "drawn like a moth to the flame of their revolutionary fire." Here's evidence that the fire still burns bright.



—*Vince Aletti*

NATHAN LYONS
Although Lyons has probably had more impact as a critic, a curator, and a teacher than as a photographer, ninety-six of his small black-and-white images make it clear that his eye for the incidental and the unlikely in the American landscape has always been keen. "Notations in Passing," the title of the first of three series collected here, sets the tone. Pictures of billboards, weathered signs, shopwindows, and rude intrusions on the landscape have an on-the-road feel. Lyons refracts influences from Aaron Siskind, Walker Evans, and Robert Frank, but there's little spontaneity here, and the series that follow often strain to make obvious points, notably about post-9/11 jingoism. Through Oct. 7. (Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930.)

FRANK MAGNOTTA
Magnotta follows in the footsteps of Goya and also of Daumier, whose nineteenth-century caricatures got him in hot water on more than one occasion. The figures in Magnotta's gallery of rogues are drawn in graphite on paper, and their style recalls R. Crumb or Edward Gorey rather than the Second Empire or La Belle Époque. Among the grotesqueries are "The Baroness," an inbred blob dripping with jewels; the bloated, wrinkly figure of "The Smoking Doctor"; and "The Happy Accident," swaddled in bandages. At times, one longs for more obvious cultural archetypes—the Anchorman, perhaps, or the Art Dealer—but Magnotta's creatures are perfectly in keeping with his slightly fantastic and cracked style. Through Oct. 14. (Cohan and Leslie, 138 Tenth Ave. 212-206-8710.)

WALTER NIEDERMAYR
Like another contemporary Italian photographer, Massimo Vitali, Niedermayr's subject is the leisure landscape. But, whereas Vitali's images of beaches and discos are very much about the occupants of these spaces, Niedermayr's multipart color photographs of ski resorts in and out of season tend to make the human presence incidental. In the show's largest piece, a fifteen-panel aerial view of a mountainside with more exposed rocks than snow, a line of tiny hikers looks like flecks of lint on a vast expanse of fabric. Scattered figures animate a number of otherwise blank snowscapes here, but they remain stray, fugitive notations on a supremely indifferent natural world. Through Oct. 7. (Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 212-366-4774.)

ALBERT OEHLEN
Majestic and jazzy, these big new abstractions confirm that Oehlen is the best German painter in the aftermath of neo-expressionism. The pictures deploy a swashbuckling repertoire of forms and techniques—drip and arabesque, slack or snappy doodles, spray-can-fuzzy and hard edges, liquid washes and fragments of figuration, colors ranging from gray mud to magenta and tangerine—in zones stabilized by passages of intensely charged white canvas. Just about anything that can happen in a painting happens in these, with no-problem pizzazz. Oehlen's a master. Through Oct. 28. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

DARIO ROBLETO
Mourning jewelry, corroded wedding rings, stitched samplers, and skeletons bespeak the folk art of bereavement in Robleto's assemblages. Presented installation style, his weirdly charged objects rest in casketlike vitrines and ornate frames in a room painted cordovan red. The general tone of nineteenth-century sentimental grief is complicated by the works' raw materials: every bone in the human body, powdered, for example, or melted bullet lead from Civil War battles, or shredded audiotape of poets like Siegfried Sassoon reading their antiwar work, or pulped letters from war widows. Through Oct. 21. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460.)

Short List

DONALD BAECHLER: Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through Oct. 28. **ISCA GREENFIELD-SANDERS:** Goff & Rosenthal, 537 W. 23rd St. 212-675-0461. Through Oct. 14. **JESPER JUST:** Rubenstein, 527 W. 23rd St. 212-627-8000. Through Oct. 28. **KAREN KILIMNIK:** 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through Nov. 4. **NICOLA LÓPEZ:** Golden, 539 W. 23rd St. 212-727-8304. Through Oct. 14. **JOHN MCCRACKEN / JOCKUM NORDSTRÖM:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Oct. 14. **VIK MUNIZ:** Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262. Through Oct. 14. **CATHERINE OPIE:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Oct. 14. **SARAH OPPENHEIMER:** P.P.O.W., 555 W. 25th St. 212-647-1044. Through Oct. 7. **KEN PRICE:** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Through Nov. 4. **KAY ROSEN:** Lambert, 564 W. 25th St. 212-242-3611. Through Oct. 21. **ALESSANDRA SANGUINETTI:** Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370. Through Oct. 14. **JESSICA STOCKHOLDER:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Through Oct. 14. **SARA VANDERBEEK:** D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460. Through Oct. 14. **CHRIS VERENE:** Kagan, 540 W. 29th St. 212-560-0670. Through Oct. 28. **"LEAST WANTED: A CENTURY OF AMERICAN MUGSHOTS":** Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978. Through Oct. 28.

DANCE

"STEVE REICH @ 70"
The monthlong, citywide celebration of the pioneering minimalist composer kicks off with a program at BAM of two contrasting dances set to his music. For the U.S. première of "Variations for Vibes, Piano and Strings," a trio for three men by the British choreographer Akram Khan, the London Sinfonietta plays the recently commissioned score. Recordings of four of Reich's early works (dating from 1966 to 1972) are the source for "Fase," a 1982 dance by his longtime admirer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, who performs with Tale Dolven, a member of her company, Rosas. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Oct. 3 and Oct. 5-7 at 7:30.)

PHILADANCO
Philadelphia's much loved troupe returns to the Joyce with a program of new works. Ronald K. Brown's "For Truth" depicts a quest for spiritual fulfillment, culminating in a euphoric section set to the music of the Nigerian Afro-beat star Femi Kuti. In Carmen de Lavallade's series of vignettes titled "Love Stories," set to Billie Holiday, a group of women dance among chairs, toying with props as they conjure an ideal of love. "Cottonwool" is a challenging new work by Christopher L. Huggins, filled with difficult lifts and jumps. (175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Oct. 3-4 at 7:30, Oct. 5-6 at 8, Oct. 7 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 8 at 2 and 7:30.)

BRIAN BROOKS MOVING COMPANY
Rarely in Brooks's thrilling new "Again Again" does anything happen only once. Again and again, the five dancers run up the rear wall, then kick off and float backward, supported by a partner. The repetition is as relentless as a fireworks show, and it doesn't let up as Brooks launches variations—sending the dancers crawling down the wall head first, making them jump up and stick. Later, a woman crosses the floor, step by methodical step, and never touches the ground; Brooks offers her parts of his body to walk upon. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Oct. 3-7 at 7:30.)

"FALL FOR DANCE"
The festival packs plenty of marquee names into its second week: New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, the Martha Graham Dance Company, and the Parsons Dance Company. But it gets its juice from the emerging and the unknown: the downtown prodigy Christopher Williams; Britain's George Piper Dances/Ballet Boyz; Hungary's Honvéd Dance Company; and the eighteen-year-old Spanish flamenco star Farruco. From the West Coast, Robert Moses's San Francisco troupe Kin and the Los Angeles tapper Jason Samuels Smith's A.C.G.I. make their New York débuts, while Pacific Northwest Ballet (now directed by Peter Boal) returns to the city for the first time in a decade. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Oct. 3-7 at 8 and Oct. 8 at 2. For complete schedule, visit www.nycitycenter.org.)

ODILE DUBOC
The resolutely philosophical Duboc has strictly avoided choreographing to music—except once, in "Trois Boléros," a trio of dances from 1996 in which each is mapped to a different version of Ravel's old

warhorse. "Boléro, Two" is on the program of chamber works for her U.S. début, at the Alliance Française, along with two of her trademark dances made "independent of music": "Trio 03," a male trio inspired by the Natalia Goncharova painting "The Wrestlers," and "ODIL," a new solo danced by Duboc herself. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-355-6160. Oct. 4-5 at 8.)

LEESAAR THE COMPANY
The Israeli contemporary choreographers Saar Harari and Lee Sher début "Moopim." (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave. 212-352-3101. Oct. 4-7 at 8:30 and Oct. 8 at 4:30.)

ALAN DANIELSON
In Danielson's "Cave," the dancers become cosmic forces, with a central figure (the very Zen longtime Limón dancer Robert Regala) swaying and turning, arms open wide, while a female figure (the wonderfully restrained Geraldine Cardiel) sets him in motion and rotates around him, as Buddhist chants fill the air. Danielson's new duet "Foreign Relations" (performed to a spoken text) explores complex interactions between two bodies, and a new group work set to luminous Scarlatti keyboard sonatas reveals his deep musicality. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Oct. 5-8 at 8:30.)

"RENNIE HARRIS'S NEW YORK LEGENDS OF HIP-HOP"
This showcase is an offshoot of an annual conference in Philadelphia that brings together hip-hop pioneers as a kind of high council of authenticity. The New York performances in 2004, stressing bicoastal styles, were a delight. For this return visit, Harris has put together a production focussing exclusively on local legends, including the Rock Steady Crew, PopMaster Fabel, and the Moptops, joined by eager young hot shots. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Oct. 6 at 7, Oct. 7 at 2 and 7, and Oct. 8 at noon and 5. Through Oct. 22.)

LIZ LERMAN DANCE EXCHANGE
The MacArthur fellow Liz Lerman doesn't shy away from big, seemingly untenable ideas; last year, Harvard Law School commissioned her to make a dance about the Nuremburg trials. Lerman went further, grasping at not only the Holocaust but Bosnia, South Africa, and Rwanda. Perhaps inevitably, "Small Dances About Big Ideas" (presented here in a revised version featuring the choreographer) is fitfully realized. The project—to turn bystanders into actors—is helped by terse and evocative text and many dance phrases that successfully embody abstractions. Coerced audience participation neatly achieves the goal, but the cumulative effect is diffuse. (Dance New Amsterdam, 280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-279-4200. Oct. 6-9 at 8.)

"FESTIVAL OF INDIA—KATHAK DANCE"
Pandit Birju Maharaj, now pushing seventy, has long been the patriarch of the Lucknow school of kathak dance. That subset of the North Indian form stresses abhinaya, or storytelling, and Maharaj is a master mime, a flamboyant shape-shifter. He is also a master of rhythm—kathak's other half—as well as a first-class singer and musician, but even his more pure-dance rhythmic improvisations are theatrically inflected. His eyes alone are a full show. At this World Music Institute event, he is joined by one of his many disciples, Saswati Sen. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Oct. 6 at 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
New choreography by Christopher Wheeldon—featuring Angel Corella, in his Met début—gives a much needed boost to the revival of Margherita Wallmann's 1966 production of Ponchielli's **"La Gioconda,"** sung by a strong cast that includes Violeta Urmana, Olga Borodina, Aquiles Machado, and Paata Burchuladze; Bertrand de Billy conducts. (Oct. 4 at 8.) ♦ With Marcello Giordani replacing Machado. (Oct. 7 at 8.) ♦ A breath of fresh air wafts into Peter Gelb's new Met, courtesy of **"Madama Butterfly."** In Anthony Minghella's cinematic production, characters dressed in richly colored costumes stalk across a black-and-white stage marked by the perpendicular lines that the walls of Butterfly's paper house make against an unforgiving horizon. The opening-night performance, masterfully conducted by James Levine, was of a piece with Minghella's bold conception: awesome, deliberate, and artfully romantic. In the title role, Cristina Gallardo-Domâs plays a weak hand with stunning success, surrounding her surprisingly frail vocalism with dramatic gestures that have the ring of truth; Marcello Giordani gives Pinkerton, the American cad, more style and nobility than he perhaps deserves. (Asher

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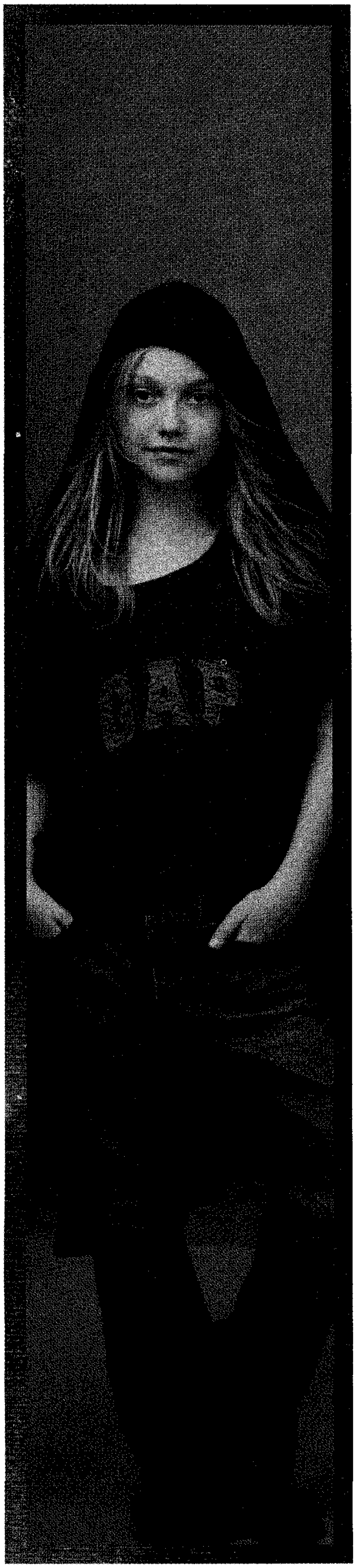
TABLES FOR TWO
DIRTY BIRD

204 W. 14th St. (212-620-4836)—"Dirty Bird" traditionally refers to any of the following: Wild Turkey bourbon, "Canada's drunkest hardcore band," a sex act you don't want to know about, and the former Atlanta Falcon Jamal Anderson's end-zone dance. Given the term's scuzzy connotations, it's curious that Allison Vines-Rushing and Slade Rushing—who commute between New York and Louisiana—have chosen it to christen a takeout counter devoted to, as the menu declares, "healthy, organic, seasonal ingredients." Here, the filth is family-friendly (dirty rice, an old Southern recipe that calls for giblets, comes in a blessedly gizzardless version) and the bird is free-range. Buttermilk-dipped or slow-roasted, this is virtuous chicken.

But, however lofty its aspirations, a New York City to-go joint must adhere to certain conventions. These include unhurried storefront service (you wonder if the fowl is not only hormone-free but hand-plucked) and a range of options (preparation, piece count, sauce, meat shade) sufficiently broad to confound even the cheeriest home-ec major. The tiny space offers a few seats, but you'd be crazy to want to eat there. (The place is almost right on top of a subway entrance, for one thing.) Smart folk plot their meals in peace—dividing and conquering the uniformly delicious sides—and call up for delivery. Within twenty minutes, a man in a bright-orange shirt arrives bearing a sack of succulent, spicy legs and thighs, soaking through their cardboard cartons. Rotisserie trumps fried or fingers; a whole, likewise, is preferable to a half or a quarter. The shallot corn bread may be soggy, but the kale is lush and redeemed from benign worthiness by dustings of red-pepper flakes and garlic. Mac and cheese (elbows, not shells) has a sweet fondue taste; Jojo's slow-roasted potatoes are perfectly browned and flecked with chives. There are even freshly baked cookies, and cold, fizzy bottles of Abita root beer. Order in a mess of their food next time you have people over, and try not to feel bad about being unable to cook anything this good. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $5.99-$20.99.)

—*Lauren Collins*

DISCOVE(RED)



Fisch conducts the remaining performances.) (Oct. 5 at 8.) ♦ Gounod's **"Faust,"** with Ruth Ann Swenson, Ramón Vargas, and Ildar Abdrazakov; de Billy. (Oct. 6 at 8.) ♦ Julie Taymor's dazzling production of **"Die Zauberflöte"** arrives as an English-language family entertainment in December, but the sexy casting of the season première—with Isabel Bayrakdarian, Jonas Kaufmann, and Nathan Gunn—shows that the management wants to entice a mature audience as well. Erika Miklósa will navigate the Queen of the Night's coloratura heights; Scott Bergeson. (Oct. 7 at 1:30 and Oct. 9 at 7:30.) ♦ Mozart's **"Idomeneo,"** in Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's grand production from 1982, features Ben Heppner in the title role, joined by Dorothea Röschmann, Olga Makarina, and Kristine Jepson; Levine. (Oct. 10 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

In Eric Wolfgang Korngold's **"Die Tote Stadt"** (1920), the story of Paul, a gentleman obsessed with his dead wife, brims with fin-de-siècle kink, but Frank Corsaro's musty staging and bleak, dated filmstrips ("multimedia," circa 1975) are ill-matched to the composer's overstuffed score. Dan Chamandy, a forceful tenor making his début, gives Paul the appropriate air of gloom; as both Marie (Paul's departed) and Marietta (Paul's live inamorata, a showgirl), the soprano Susan B. Anthony lacks the vocal heft to project through Korngold's dense orchestration (deftly wrangled by the company's music director, George Manahan). The one spot of brilliance is a lovesick aria ("Pierrots Tanzlied") offered by the baritone Keith Phares—a sad clown of the highest order. (Oct. 5 at 7:30 and Oct. 8 at 1:30.) ♦ **"Carmen,"** with Rinat Shaham, Latonia Moore, Mark Duffin, and Adrian Gans; Ari Pelto. (Oct. 7 at 1:30.) ♦ Jonathan Miller, who once set Act III of "Rigoletto" in an Edward Hopper-style diner in Little Italy, comes to City Opera to set **"L'Elisir d'Amore"** in another greasy spoon, in the American Southwest. Hoping that lightning strikes twice are Anna Skibinsky (a début), John Tessier, Paulo Szot, and Jan Opalach, who take the leading roles; Manahan. (Oct. 7 at 8.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

"THE END OF CINEMATICS"

Mikel Rouse, a downtown star whose previous works of "opéra vérité" have illuminated the conflicts between pop culture and spirituality in America through catchy music and a shrewd theatrical sense, makes his BAM début with the final opera in the cycle, a multimedia fantasia inspired by Susan Sontag essays. (BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Oct. 4-7 at 7:30.)

DICAPO OPERA: "THE MERRY WIDOW"

New York's third professional opera company mounts a production of Lehár's classy comedy of romantic misadventure, in an English-language version by Wendy Wasserstein; Constantine Kitsopoulos conducts. (Dicapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. 212-288-9438. Oct. 5 at 6:30, Oct. 7 at 8, and Oct. 8 at 4. Through Oct. 15.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Few of Lorin Maazel's recordings are considered to be definitive interpretations, but his rendering of Ravel's charming one-act opera **"L'Enfant et les Sortilèges,"** a mainstay of the Deutsche Grammophon catalogue, is an exception. Expect a shimmering and exact rendition from the Philharmonic, which will offer a concert performance with a cast that includes Patrizia Ciofi and Susanne Mentzer; Saint-Saëns's "Organ" Symphony (with Kent Tritle) completes the program. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Oct. 5 at 7:30 and Oct. 6 at 8.)

CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA

The Carnegie Hall season begins in high style with a trio of concerts by the impeccable ensemble, conducted by its music director, Franz Welser-Möst. Oct. 4 at 7: The opener features star turns from Leif Ove Andsnes (in Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 17 in G Major) and Thomas Quasthoff (singing five songs from Mahler's "Des Knaben

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DVD NOTES
GLASS HOUSES

Jacques Tati's **"Playtime,"** from 1967, newly released in a dazzling remastering from Criterion, is the cinema's fiercest and funniest jeremiad against the rigid geometry of modern architecture and the utopian social engineering that it imposes. It was also a disaster for its creator.

In order to have a glass-and-steel city at his disposal for the eighteen months that the complex shoot required, Tati had to construct one. "Tativille," built on the outskirts of Paris, featured two completely functioning mini-skyscrapers, an immense array of near-life-size sets, and asphalt-paved roads. As costs mounted, the director sank his home, his family fortune, and rights to his previous films into the magnum opus. The making of "Playtime" proved to be as enormous an undertaking as the construction of its set: in this simulated futuristic Paris (where the familiar monuments are seen only as distant reflections in glass doors), Tati put swarms of people in motion, dispersed multiple fields of action throughout the frame, and captured the choreographed tumult on 65-mm. film in order to render the details with a manic precision.

Criterion's new digital transfer is a revelation; it reproduces Tati's hyperrealistic images and their blue-silver metallic palette with startling clarity. The boxed set also features a disk of extras, including an interview with Tati from 1976, in which he confides that he didn't like to show bedrooms in his films, explaining, "I'm always afraid not to be allowed to lock the door." In "Playtime," Tati keeps his characters in public view, even filming families at home through all-revealing wall-size windows that face the street. The glass houses and offices of Tativille are made for surveillance, and the main order of business is to keep up appearances. Not only are its residents constantly looking at each other; the ubiquitous reflections subject them to endless, anxious self-scrutiny.

The film tells the story of missed connections—Monsieur Hulot (Tati) has trouble connecting with the bureaucrat Giffard in the office building where he works, and with a lithe young American woman (Barbara Dennek) whom he glimpses in passing, through the window of a bus—and they are missed because of the unnatural divisions and artificial maneuvers imposed upon people by the glass panels, rectilinear spaces, and electronic devices of the modern city. Despite the breathtaking wonder of Tati's inventions and the exquisite humor of his innumerable visual jokes and sound gags, the modern world he portrays is a soul-killing, love-destroying horror. When Tati presented this stupendous masterwork to the public, in 1967, it failed commercially, bankrupting him.

—*Richard Brody*

Wunderhorn"), along with some bonbons from Alt Wien (Suppé's "Light Cavalry" Overture and Johann Strauss II's "Fledermaus" Overture). ♦ Oct. 5 at 8: Two repertory chestnuts—Dvořák's ruddy Fifth Symphony and Debussy's diaphanous "La Mer"—will cushion the landing of "Touché," a modernist music-theatre piece by Hanspeter Kyburz that features the soprano Laura Aikin and the tenor John Mark Ainsley. ♦ Oct. 7 at 8: Quasthoff returns to sing a clutch of Mozart concert arias, a prelude for Bruckner's imposing Symphony No. 5. (212-247-7800.)

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Bernard Haitink has become an éminence grise among conductors because of his probing (if not always exciting) musicianship, his collegial mien, and his sheer longevity on the podiums of Europe. His festival of Beethoven symphonies with the superior British orchestra will provide a sterling start to the Great Performers series at Lincoln Center. Oct. 7 at 8: The Symphonies Nos. 2 and 3 ("Eroica"). ♦ Oct. 8 at 3: A program featuring the Fifth and Eighth Symphonies begins with the "Fidelio" Overture. ♦ Oct. 10 at 8: The Symphonies Nos. 4 and 6 ("Pastoral"). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-5600. Through Oct. 13.)

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
A stunning week for orchestras at Carnegie Hall continues with a concert by James Levine's Boston band, which, after a performance of Schoenberg's arch-Romantic "Transfigured Night," becomes a showcase for the pianist Daniel Barenboim, performing both Schoenberg's ruggedly beautiful Piano Concerto and Beethoven's transcendent Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major. (212-247-7800. Oct. 9 at 8.)

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA
Christoph Eschenbach's luxurious ensemble completes the Carnegie schedule, offering a program of Brahms (the Piano Concerto No. 2, with André Watts) and Tchaikovsky (the Symphony No. 6, "Pathétique"). (212-247-7800. Oct. 10 at 8.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC
Oct. 5-6 at 7:30: The violinist William Harvey, the cellist Chris Gross, and the pianist Katya Mihailova perform piano trios by Haydn, Dvořák (in F Minor, Op. 65), and Adolphus Hailstork. ♦ Oct. 7 at 7:30 and Oct. 8 at 4: Music by Schubert, Mozart (including the Piano Quartet in G Minor), and Shostakovich, offered by the violinist Naoko Tanaka, the pianist Rita Sloan, and others. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

MUSIC AT THE FRICK COLLECTION: LEON MCCAWLEY
The young British pianist, an alumnus of the Curtis Institute of Music and an EMI recording artist, makes his New York début with a recital of music by Mozart, Schubert (the Sonata in A Minor, D. 537), Rachmaninoff (the "Corelli Variations"), and the Scottish pedagogue Hans Gál. (1 E. 70th St. 212-547-0715. Oct. 8 at 5.)

EAR TO THE EARTH FESTIVAL
A weeklong round of installations and panel discussions centered on music and the environment, sponsored by the Electronic Music Foundation, is also rich in concerts—including a "surround sound" event at the 3-Legged Dog Art & Technology Center that features works based on natural sounds from Ghana, Japan, and Finland by the composer and ethnomusicologist (and MacArthur fellow) Steven Feld. (80 Greenwich St. Oct. 8 at 8. For ticket information and full schedule, see www.eartotheearth.org.)

VLADIMIR FELTSMAN
The Russian pianist, master of a muscular yet fine-grained style, downshifts to the light touch needed for the fortepiano (in this case, a copy of one by Anton Walter, one of Mozart's favorite makers), in the final concerts of a two-week cycle exploring Mozart's complete piano sonatas. (Mannes College of Music, 150 W. 85th St. Oct. 10 at 7:30. ♦ Tishman Auditorium, the New School, 66 W. 12th St. Oct. 12 at 7:30.) (212-229-5488.)

MOVIES OPENING

ALEX RIDER: OPERATION STORMBREAKER
Alex Pettyfer and Ewan McGregor star in this adventure film about a teen-age spy, directed by Geoffrey Sax. Opening Oct. 6. (In wide release.)

BLACK GOLD
A documentary, directed by Marc and Nick Francis, about the effect of the world coffee trade on farmers in Ethiopia. In English, Oromifa, and Amharic. Opening Oct. 6. (Cinema Village.)

THE DEPARTED
Martin Scorsese's drama about the Irish Mafia in Boston stars Leonardo DiCaprio, Matt Damon, Jack Nicholson, Martin Sheen, and Vera Farmiga. Opening Oct. 6. (In wide release.)

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH
A comedy, directed by Greg Coolidge, about two men (Dane Cook and Dax Shepard) who work at a big-box store and compete for the affection of a female colleague (Jessica Simpson). Opening Oct. 6. (In wide release.)

49 UP
The seventh film in the documentary series, which started in 1964 with "Seven Up!" Directed by Michael Apted. Opening Oct. 6. (IFC Center.)

LITTLE CHILDREN
A drama, directed by Todd Field, about romance and malaise among suburban families. Starring Kate Winslet, Jennifer Connelly, Noah Emmerich, and Patrick Wilson. Based on the novel by Tom Perrotta. Opening Oct. 6. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

SHORTBUS
A sexually explicit drama, directed by John Cameron Mitchell, about a group of hip New Yorkers who meet through an art gallery. Opening Oct. 4. (Chelsea Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

. . . SO GOES THE NATION
A documentary about the 2004 Presidential election, with an emphasis on Ohio. Directed by James D. Stern and Adam Del Deo. Opening Oct. 4. (IFC Center.)

THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE: THE BEGINNING
Jonathan Liebesman directed this horror prequel, set in the nineteen-sixties. Opening Oct. 6. (In wide release.)

WRESTLING WITH ANGELS
A documentary about the playwright Tony Kushner, directed by Freida Lee Mock. Opening Oct. 4. (Film Forum.)

NOW PLAYING

ALL THE KING'S MEN
Overemphatic and vague at the same time. Sean Penn, as Willie Stark, the Southern country boy who wants to be governor, wears his hair cropped close at the sides and standing up straight on top. Looking engorged, Penn works hard to put Willie's demagogic speeches over. (The burly Broderick Crawford, who played Willie in the earlier adaptation of Robert Penn Warren's novel, from 1949, was a more natural fit.) Willie rises abruptly, corrupting himself and everyone around him, but Steven Zaillian, who wrote and directed this version, doesn't give us much sense of what Willie actually does. What attracts Zaillian's interest is not politics but the social subtext of Penn Warren's novel—the way a crude country lawyer mesmerizes the feeble remnants of the old Southern aristocracy. Much of the movie is moony and slack. With the charming but recessive Jude Law as the reporter who throws in his lot with Willie; Kate Winslet and Mark Ruffalo, both awful, as ineffably cultivated siblings; James Gandolfini and Patricia Clarkson as backroom pols; and Anthony Hopkins as an old judge with a slab of white hair. James Horner wrote the overbearing music.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 10/2/06.) (In wide release.)

BELLE TOUJOURS
In this luminous new film, the ninety-seven-year-old director Manoel de Oliveira updates the char-

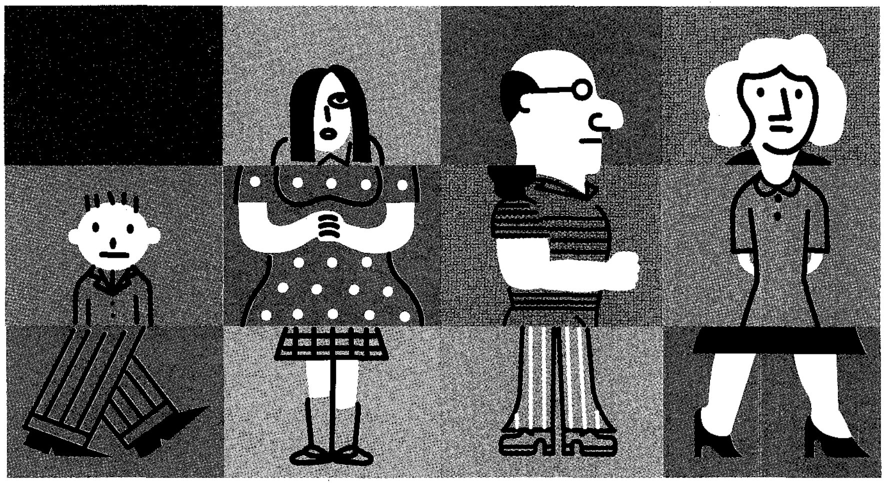
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK BOYS' NIGHT OUT

DEMETRIOS PSILLOS

Before the nineteen-eighties, male-male partnering was a rare sight on the dance stage. With gay rights, we started getting more male duets, but they tended to be narrow in feeling. Some were aggressive (gay men are real men); some were lachrymose (gay men are dying of AIDS). Few were anything else. With time, however, the male duet has grown larger, subtler. This weekend, as part of City Center's "Fall for Dance" series, Michael Nunn and William Trevitt, the founding directors of George Piper Dances, will reprise Russell Maliphant's "Torsion," from 2002. Here nobody beats anybody up or makes us cry. The two men seem to be dancing about their friendship. But forget that, even. What a joy it is just to see two men dance together, with all that male bodies can deliver (weight, shoulders). How big those guys look when they're lifted into the air! Interestingly, Nunn and Trevitt seem to be straight; the advance articles make a point of telling us that each has a wife. So, just as with hip-hop, the minority story is being picked up by the mainstream—a sure sign that it's arrived.

—*Joan Acocella*

acters brought to the screen by Luis Buñuel in his classic from 1967, "Belle de Jour." A solitary old man, Henri Husson (Michel Piccoli, reprising his role from the earlier film), glimpses and follows an elderly yet stunning platinum-blond woman, Séverine Serizy (Bulle Ogier, taking over for Catherine Deneuve). Though they haven't seen each other in forty years, they have been silently bound together by a perverse liaison—Husson, the best friend of Séverine's husband, had found her working in an upscale brothel—and by the unanswered question of whether he had told her husband. Their reunion is the pretext for an extraordinarily graceful, good-humored, and subtly heartbreaking reflection on last chances. Through Husson, Oliveira savors the joys of life in loving and intimate detail—a Dvořák symphony, the streets of Paris, a glass of whiskey, a barstool confession, a woman's beauty—as if each risked being the last. Oliveira has no time for the trivial; each image of this sixty-eight-minute bijou is lucid, precise, and essential, like life as viewed from beyond. The concluding farewell, inspired by music, is as refined a rage against the dying of the light as the cinema has yet offered.—*Richard Brody* (New York Film Festival; Oct. 5.)



"49 Up," Michael Apted's latest installment in the documentary series, opens Oct. 6.

RICHARD McGUIRE

THE BLACK DAHLIA

This Brian De Palma movie about the notorious Betty Short murder case, from 1947, which was the basis for a 1987 novel by James Ellroy, suffers from rampant allusiveness to other movies set in Los Angeles. The picture is a kind of fattened goose that's been stuffed with . . . goose-liver pâté. It's overrich and fundamentally unsatisfying. De Palma's screenwriter, Josh Friedman, shovels tons of undigested Ellroy onto the screen. The hero, an honest young cop named Dwight Bleichert (Josh Hartnett), toiling at the edges of a tangled mess of betrayal stretching back for decades, never quite understands what's going on, and often we don't, either. The narrative is so awkwardly arranged that when the pieces of the puzzle finally fall into place the effect is less dramatic than diagrammatic—character A slept with character B thirty years earlier, and, oh, yes, all of that connects to crimes X, Y, and Z. With Aaron Eckhart as Dwight's partner; Scarlett Johansson in a sweater, her hair up, as a lushly sensual baby Lana Turner; Hilary Swank, her mouth twisted with desire, as a lecherous, lying, raven-haired heiress; and Mia Kirshner as Betty Short herself—a slender, frightened girl glimpsed in some screen tests, a girl desperately eager to please.—*D.D.* (9/18/06) (In wide release.)

GRIDIRON GANG

All those years in the wrestling ring have given The Rock (Dwayne Johnson) an amusing self-awareness. He's charismatic and stentorian and doesn't take a damn thing seriously. In this film, another crowd-pleasing take on "The Longest Yard," he plays a tough but tender coach who inspires a group of juvenile offenders to take their violence to the playing field instead of to the streets. The director, Phil Joanou, gives the material a confident staging, even when the heavy-handed speeches about teamwork and responsibility threaten to reduce the movie to an after-school special.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

HOLLYWOODLAND

Allen Coulter's mystery movie is itself hard to unpack: part period drama, part open-ended thriller, it pays uneasy homage to a bad dream of stardom. Ben Affleck plays George Reeves, the cheerful hulk of the nineteen-fifties who was unable to repeat on the big screen his popular triumph as Superman on the small one. Diane Lane turns in yet another fine performance, at once strong-minded and easily bruised, in the role of Reeves's older married lover. Reeves's death, in 1959, has long been one of the minor enigmas of Hollywood, and we duly follow a fictional detective (Adrien Brody) as he tries, and fails, to deliver a clear solution. The problem is not just that Brody seems too reedy and gentle for a private eye but that the aftermath of Reeves's career is no match for the brief and glamorous flare of the living man. In the end, the movie belongs to Lane, for her portrait of a beautiful woman mounting a wry, doomed defense against the abrasions of time. With Bob Hoskins as her husband, a doting, cuckolded thug.—*Anthony Lane* (9/11/06) (In wide release.)

JESUS CAMP

Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady document a growing evangelical-Christian movement in the Midwest, focussing on a Pentecostal children's-camp pastor, Becky Fischer, and three young campers. The filmmakers insinuate that the religious right, a powerful voting bloc in the U.S., is training a generation of children ("God's army") to carry on their message. In brief scenes of the children's home lives, their parents teach creationism as fact and deny the existence of global warming. The compassionate portraits resonate with empathy, particularly those of Rachael, nine, a sweet, nervous ball of energy who revels in the thought of being considered a martyr, and Levi, twelve, a bright, idealistic young man eager to preach the Gospel. Ewing and Grady present the Methodist radio host Mike Papantonio, a staunch defender of the separation of church and state, as a voice of opposition to Pastor Becky's evangelical beliefs, but the recalcitrant nature of her doctrine remains impenetrable.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

JET LI'S FEARLESS

Bracketed by supremely satisfying martial-arts scenes choreographed by the action wizard Yuen Wo Ping, Jet Li's new period epic, the biography of the martial-arts expert Huo Yuanjia, is a textbook example of the art of wushu, a physical discipline and spiritual philosophy that values honor and humility above all. The film concentrates on Huo's journey from drunken master to noble hero, and the lavish settings and Li's agile, dynamic performance combine to make a thoughtful action film that's less aggressive than fans may expect. The muscular lyricism of the director, Ronny Yu, creates a kung-fu ballet, by turns contemplative and kinetically rich.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND

For the role of General Idi Amin Dada, the dictator of Uganda in the nineteen-seventies, Forest Whitaker has transformed himself. The laugh has become enormous, the arms like grappling hooks. This dictator has a terrifying affability: like many sociopaths, he can be intensely empathic. He figures out what people want, but, once you have received his generosity, he believes you belong to him forever. Whitaker goes all the way into Amin's childlike flights of fantasy and egotistical visions, and, as he speaks, one eye opens wide and the other droops malevolently—even his vision is schizoid. James McAvoy is the cocky young Scottish doctor who becomes the General's physician and confidant. Flattered by the great man's interest in him, he refuses to notice the purges and the slaughter going on in the country. Kevin Macdonald, who earlier made documentaries ("One Day in September" and "Touching the Void"), concentrates on the relationship of the two men, and makes something tense and alive out of it. With Gillian Anderson. Shot in Uganda.—*D.D.* (10/2/06) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE LAST KISS

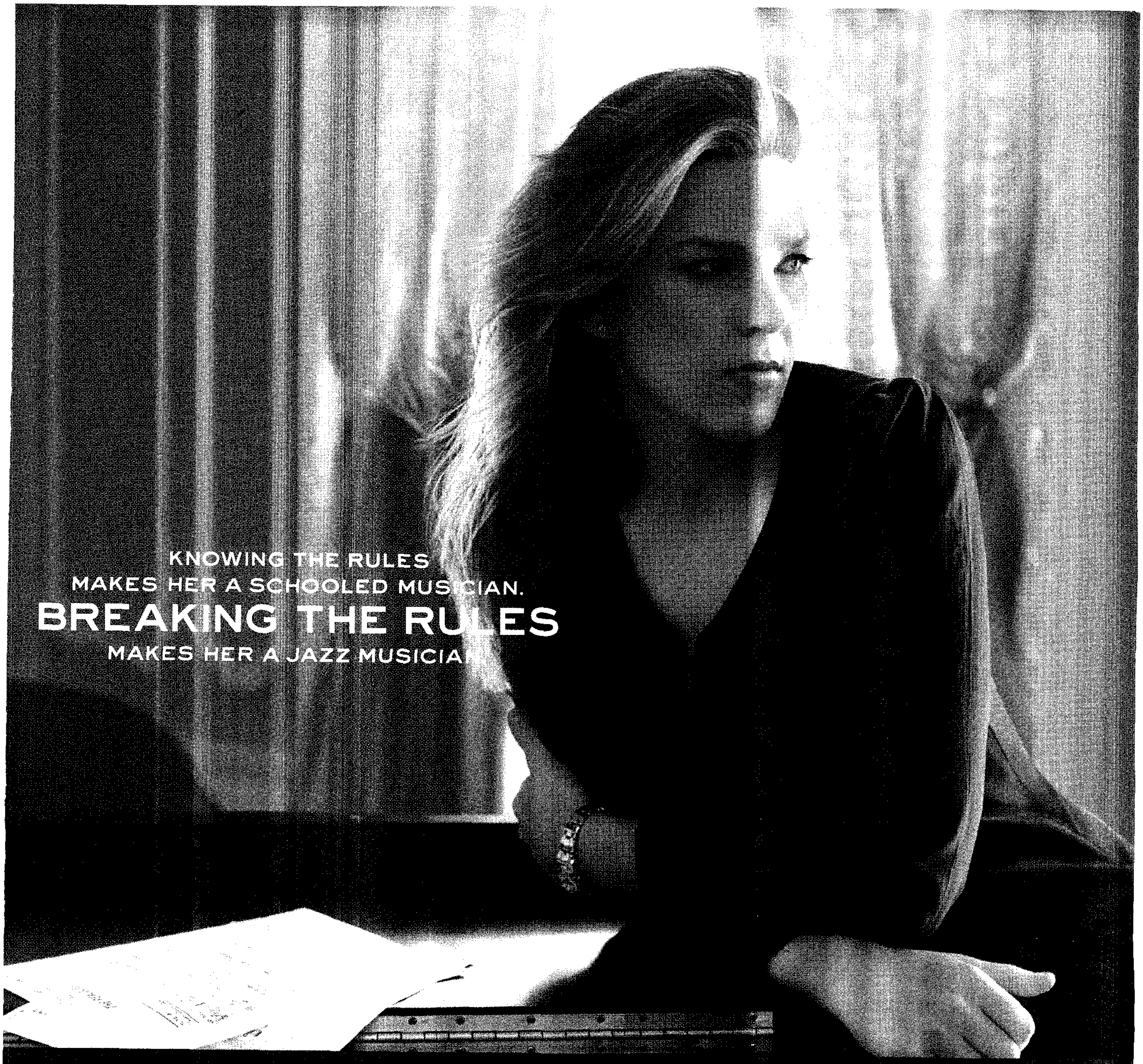
The tiresome premise of Tony Goldwyn's remake of an Italian hit film from 2001—a twenty-nine-year-old architect, Michael (Zach Braff), freaks out at the news that his girlfriend is pregnant and falls for a cute college girl (the intriguing Rachel Bilson)—plays out ploddingly in spite of some terrific acting. Jacinda Barrett steals the show as Michael's beautiful, reasonable life partner, offering a volatile, realistic portrayal of a woman scorned, and a subplot with Blythe Danner and Tom Wilkinson as her unhappy parents threatens to be more interesting than any scene involving the unctuous Braff.—*S.L.* (In wide release.)

LIBERTÉ ET PATRIE

The title of this twenty-minute video by Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, "Freedom and Fatherland," is the official slogan of the Canton de Vaud, in Switzerland, where the filmmakers live and grew up. To fulfill their commission from a Swiss cultural festival, they adapted a great Swiss novel, "Aimé Pache, Painter from the Vaud," by Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, from 1911 (about a local artist who goes to Paris for his education and then returns home). They extruded its autobiographical analogies to Godard's own life and work, using a choice set of clips from Godard's films to coincide with events from the painter's life, verbal references to modern times and to Godard's own—Sartre, the late nineteen-sixties, the cinema—and images of the Swiss terrain, which plays a decisive role in the work of Pache, Godard, and Miéville (an important filmmaker in her own right). The effect is one of mirrors within mirrors: art is endowed with the immediate personal intensity of lived experience, and a life's memory emerges, with exemplary pathos, as a wondrous fiction. This compact crystallization of fable and reality is as ample as a full-length feature.—*R.B.* (Walter Reade Theatre; Oct. 7.)

LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE

A charming, independently made family comedy about a winner-take-all society—America—that is driving its citizens crazy. Its hero and victim, Richard Hoover (Greg Kinnear), is a motivational speaker who has invented a nine-step program for success. His seven-year-old daughter, Olive (Abigail Breslin), is entering a Little Miss Sunshine contest; his stepson, Dwayne (Paul Dano), has a private dream in which he is a Nietzschean Übermensch; his wife's brother (Steve Carell), whom the family has taken in, is the No. 1 Proust scholar in the country but has made a fool of himself over a male graduate student who has leaped into the bed of the No. 2 Proust scholar. Is winning everything? The writer, Michael Arndt, and the husband-and-wife directing team, Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, narrowly avoid the family-comedy pitfalls of whimsy and mush, but Arndt has a good ear for domestic irritations and the acting is just tough enough to keep us off balance.—*D.D.* (7/31/06) (In wide release.)



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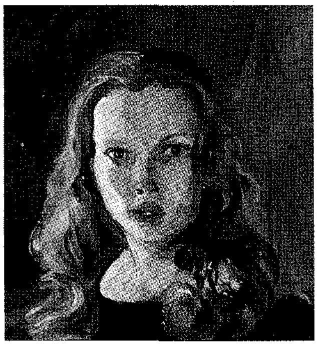
NEW YORK

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
HEARTFELT

Karen Kilimnik—the fey, tough, profoundly influential daydreamer from Philadelphia—shows new little paintings and big installations at the 303 Gallery. As usual, the effect is enchanting and embarrassing in equal measure. A Napoleonic campaign tent is tricked out with a map table, a small chandelier, a fancy sword, and toy cuirassiers. A hexagonal pavilion or folly, also in Empire style, features video of an ersatz darkling forest in which tiny ballerinas appear and then vanish. Some of the disarmingly amateurish paintings depict warhorses à la Géricault, a sailing ship, a swan, Emma Peel of "The Avengers," and a frowzy Scarlett Johansson, entitled "The Girl in the Pearl Earring in Shakespeare's Cottage." What explains the power of Kilimnik's girlish fixations on history and celebrity? In an art culture sickened with self-consciousness, her work has become a default reference for beauty, as an ideal, and sincerity, as a given. Never mind that her ingenuousness feels a mite mad. She represents a lately neglected commonsense rule for making art: mean it.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*



KAREN KILIMNIK, "THE GIRL IN THE PEARL EARRING IN SHAKESPEARE'S COTTAGE" (2005)

THE ORGANIZER
A nearly forgotten near-great movie, with one of Marcello Mastroianni's classic tragicomic performances. Without any taint of sentimentality, he creates moments of Chaplinesque farce and poignancy as a former academic who rides into turn-of-the-century Turin on a freight train, wearing pince-nez and rags, and proceeds to galvanize the workers at a textile mill. He's part absent-minded professor and part ramrod, a humane intellectual but also a political animal ready to steel his forces for a prolonged strike and to exploit their martyrdom. The director, Mario Monicelli, employs his knack for ensemble comedy-drama to draw you into the plight of the individual factory hands, who include the veteran character actor Folco Lulli and the vivid young Renato Salvatori. Giuseppe Rotunno did the masterly black-and-white cinematography, which is as evocative as old lithographs. Released in 1963. In Italian.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade Theatre; Oct. 10.)

THE QUEEN
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

RENAISSANCE
The plot is nothing new. A woman goes missing in a shadow-drenched city, and a taciturn cop, assigned to the case, unpeels her secret, and, with it, a lurking conspiracy. What lifts Christian Volckman's movie above other recent stabs at film noir is the precision with which it sets out to look, and feel, as noir as technically possible. The story is semi-animated, with the gestures of real actors transferred by motion capture to the stylized figures who stalk the black-and-white landscape. (Grays are kept to a minimum, lest they dilute the mood.) The setting is Paris, just under fifty years from now, and Volckman toys with the gothic elongations to which the city has succumbed; the result may not be credible, but it flirts cleverly with the limits of the imaginable. The chief villain turns out to be the shrivelled dialogue, which—even though spoken by performers such as Daniel Craig and Jonathan Pryce—would probably sound better in French.—*A.L.* (9/25/06) (Sunshine Cinema.)

SALÒ
Pier Paolo Pasolini's last film, from 1975, is also in a way the ultimate film: its representation of depravity may be unsurpassable. Pasolini sets the Marquis de Sade's "120 Days of Sodom" in 1944-45, in a sumptuous villa in Mussolini's Republic of Salò, the Nazi puppet regime of northern Italy, where four potentates bring a phalanx of young men and women to submit to their unlimited power and pleasure. In the stately grand salon, with its paintings and piano, two grandes dames lyrically recite Sadean tales of obscene degradation to the accompaniment of Chopin as the men oversee the rituals of the house—rape, torture, coprophagy, mutilation, and murder—which Pasolini depicts clearly, unflinchingly, even lyrically. Shifting the viewer's sympathy to the killers, Pasolini suggests that the classical values of Western civilization are steeped in the blood of innocents. This film is essential to have seen but impossible to watch: a viewer may find life itself defiled beyond redemption by the simple fact that such things can be shown or even imagined.—*R.B.* (IFC Center; Oct. 10.)

SCHOOL FOR SCOUNDRELS
In this flat, sour, and contrived comedy, Roger (Jon Heder), a timid New York City parking cop who is overmatched at work and in love, signs up for classes with a macho confidence guru, Dr. P. (Billy Bob Thornton), and, taught to find his inner lion, gets up the nerve to ask out his secret dream girl, his Australian grad-student neighbor, Amanda (Jacinda Barrett). Dr. P.'s brutal psychodramatic methods, however, also include his own attempt to seduce Amanda, and the movie becomes an escalating war of scams by which the two contenders try to discredit, displace, and destroy each other. Despite the attempt at authenticity through the use of real and recognizable New York locations, the gleefully mean-spirited humor quickly ramps up to a ludicrous implausibility. The good premise, funny actors, and sharp, nasty dialogue are wasted on ridiculous situations that seem created for exaggerated gags that don't even have the virtue of cartoonishness. Unpleasant, unfunny, unnecessary racial stereotypes abound; what were Scot Armstrong (who co-wrote) and Todd Phillips (who co-wrote and directed) thinking?—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP
The new project from Michel Gondry proves that he is still determined to treat cinema as an advanced form of child's play. Gael García Bernal plays a young Mexican, recently returned to Paris, who takes a dreary job and meets a couple of French girls when they drill through the wall of his apartment. One of them (Charlotte Gainsbourg) almost becomes his paramour, and his stumbles toward her—not to mention the dreams that he wraps around her—make up the bulk of the story. Gondry scorns any need to mark the border of sleeping and waking, slipping like a spy between the two; normal conversations keep branching off into fantasy, and a grinning Bernal takes every change in stride. The outcome is sometimes jubilant but mostly shapeless, and Gondry could have used some help from Charlie Kaufman, with whom he concocted "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind." Despite the sprightly makeover, it's the old problem: when people start telling you their dreams, you don't know where to look.—*A.L.* (9/25/06) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

EVERYONE'S HERO: In wide release. **FLYBOYS:** In wide release. **THE GUARDIAN:** In wide release. **JACKASS NUMBER TWO:** In wide release. **OPEN SEASON:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Screening Room," television interviews by Robert Gardner. Oct. 4 at 7:30: Interview with Jonas Mekas (1981), presented by Gardner and Mekas. Preceded by a reception at 6:30. ◆ "Essential Cinema." Oct. 5 at 7:30: "Enthusiasm" (1931, Dziga Vertov; with sound effects). ◆ Oct. 7 at 5:30: "Three Songs About Lenin" (1934, Vertov; in Russian). ◆ Oct. 7 at 7: "The Man with a Movie Camera" (1929, Vertov; silent). ◆ Oct. 8 at 4:30: "The Eleventh Year" (1928, Vertov; silent). ◆ Oct. 8 at 6 and 8: "L'Atalante" (1934, Jean Vigo; in French) and "Taris" (1931, Vigo; in French).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Through Oct. 11: "J'Aime le Cinéma Américain: Agnès B. Selects." Oct. 5 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "It's a Gift" (1934, Norman Z. McLeod). ◆ Oct. 6 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Freaks" (1932, Tod Browning). ◆ Oct. 7 at 3, 6, and 9: "Lost Highway" (1996, David Lynch). ◆ Oct. 8 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Pink Flamingos" (1972, John Waters). ◆ Oct. 9 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Reflections in a Golden Eye" (1967, John Huston). The 6:50 screening will be introduced by Agnès B. ◆ Oct. 10 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Reservoir Dogs" (1992, Quentin Tarantino).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through Oct. 5: "Pythonalot." Oct. 4-5 at 1:20, 5:10, and 9: "Jabberwocky" (1977, Terry Gilliam). ◆ Oct. 4-5 at 3:20 and 7:10: "And Now for Something Completely Different" (1971, Ian McNaughton). ◆ In revival. Oct. 6-10: "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie" (1972, Luis Buñuel; in French).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Oct. 31: French comedies. Oct. 10 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "The Visitors" (1993, Jean-Marie Poiré; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Movie Night with Terry Gilliam." Oct. 4 at 7:30: The director will select and introduce a favorite film. (Call for program information.) ♦ Through Oct. 29: Eric Rohmer's "Six Moral Tales." Oct. 6 and Oct. 9 at noon: "The Girl at the Monceau Bakery" (1963; in French) and "Suzanne's Career" (1963; in French). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Oct. 6-7: "Grey Gardens" (1975, Albert Maysles, David Maysles, Ellen Hovde, and Muffie Meyer). ♦ Children's films. Oct. 7-8 at 11 A.M.: Short animated films based on works by Dr. Seuss, including "The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins" (1944, George Pal). ♦ Double feature. Oct. 10 at 7: "Salò" (†) and "I Stand Alone" (1998, Gaspar Noé), introduced by Noé.

LINCOLN PLAZA CINEMAS

Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280)—The films of Pedro Almodóvar. Call for showtimes. Oct. 4-5: "Matador" (1986; in Spanish). ♦ Oct. 6-10: "Bad Education" (2004; in Spanish).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Made in NY." Oct. 5 at 6: "American Psycho" (2000, Mary Harron). ♦ Oct. 5 at 8: "The French Connection" (1971, William Friedkin). ♦ Oct. 6 at 6 and Oct. 8 at 2: "On the Ropes" (1999, Nanette Burstein and Brett Morgen). ♦ Oct. 6 at 8 and Oct. 8 at 2: "Rosemary's Baby" (1968, Roman Polanski). ♦ Oct. 9 at 5: "Mean Streets" (1973, Martin Scorsese). ♦ Oct. 9 at 7:15: "Dog Day Afternoon" (1975, Sidney Lumet). ♦ Special screenings. Oct. 4 at 7:45: "Sunrise" (1927, F. W. Murnau; silent). ♦ Oct. 5 at 6:30 and Oct. 6 at 8: "A.K.A. Nikki S. Lee" (2006, Lee). The Oct. 5 screening will be introduced by the director. ♦ Through Oct. 29: The films of Otto Preminger. Oct. 5 at 8: "Saint Joan" (1957). ♦ Oct. 6 at 6: "Carmen Jones" (1954). ♦ Oct. 7 at 4 and Oct. 8 at 5:15: "The Moon Is Blue" (1953). ♦ Oct. 7 at 6:30: "The Moon Is Blue" (1953; German-language version). ♦ Oct. 8 at 3: "Bonjour Tristesse" (1957).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—The films of Josef von Sternberg. Oct. 6 at 7:30 and Oct. 8 at 5:30: "The Devil Is a Woman" (1935). ♦ Oct. 7 at 2: "Crime and Punishment" (1935). ♦ Oct. 7 at 4: "The Shanghai Gesture" (1943). ♦ Oct. 8 at 3: "Macao" (1952, von Sternberg and Nicholas Ray). ♦ Special screening. Oct. 9 at 1:30: "Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan" (1982, Nicholas Meyer).

NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600; for tickets, go to www.filmlinc.com)—Through Oct. 15: Festival screenings. Oct. 4 at 7: "Reds" (1981, Warren Beatty). ♦ Oct. 5 at 6: "49 Up" (2006, Michael Apted). ♦ Oct. 5 at 9:30: "Belle Toujours" (†). ♦ Oct. 6 at 6 and Oct. 7 at 3: "Private Fears in Public Places" (2006, Alain Resnais; in French). ♦ Oct. 6 at 9 and Oct. 8 at 5:45: "Offside" (2006, Jafar Panahi; in Farsi). ♦ Oct. 7 at 12:30: "Paprika" (2006, Satoshi Kon; in Japanese). ♦ Oct. 7 at 6:15: "Syndromes and a Century" (2006, Apichatpong Weerasethakul; in Thai). ♦ Oct. 7 at 9 and Oct. 8 at noon: "Volver" (2006, Pedro Almodóvar; in Spanish). ♦ Oct. 7 at midnight and Oct. 9 at 3:30: "The Host" (2006, Bong Joon-ho; in Korean). ♦ Oct. 8 at 3 and Oct. 9 at 9: "The Journals of Knud Rasmussen" (2006, Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn; in English, Inuktitut, and Danish). ♦ Oct. 8 at 8:30 and Oct. 9 at 11:30 A.M.: "Inland Empire" (2006, David Lynch). ♦ Oct. 9 at 6:30 and Oct. 10 at 9: "Falling" (2006, Barbara Albert; in German). ♦ Oct. 10 at 6: "Triad Election" (2006, Johnnie To; in Mandarin and Cantonese).

PIONEER THEATRE

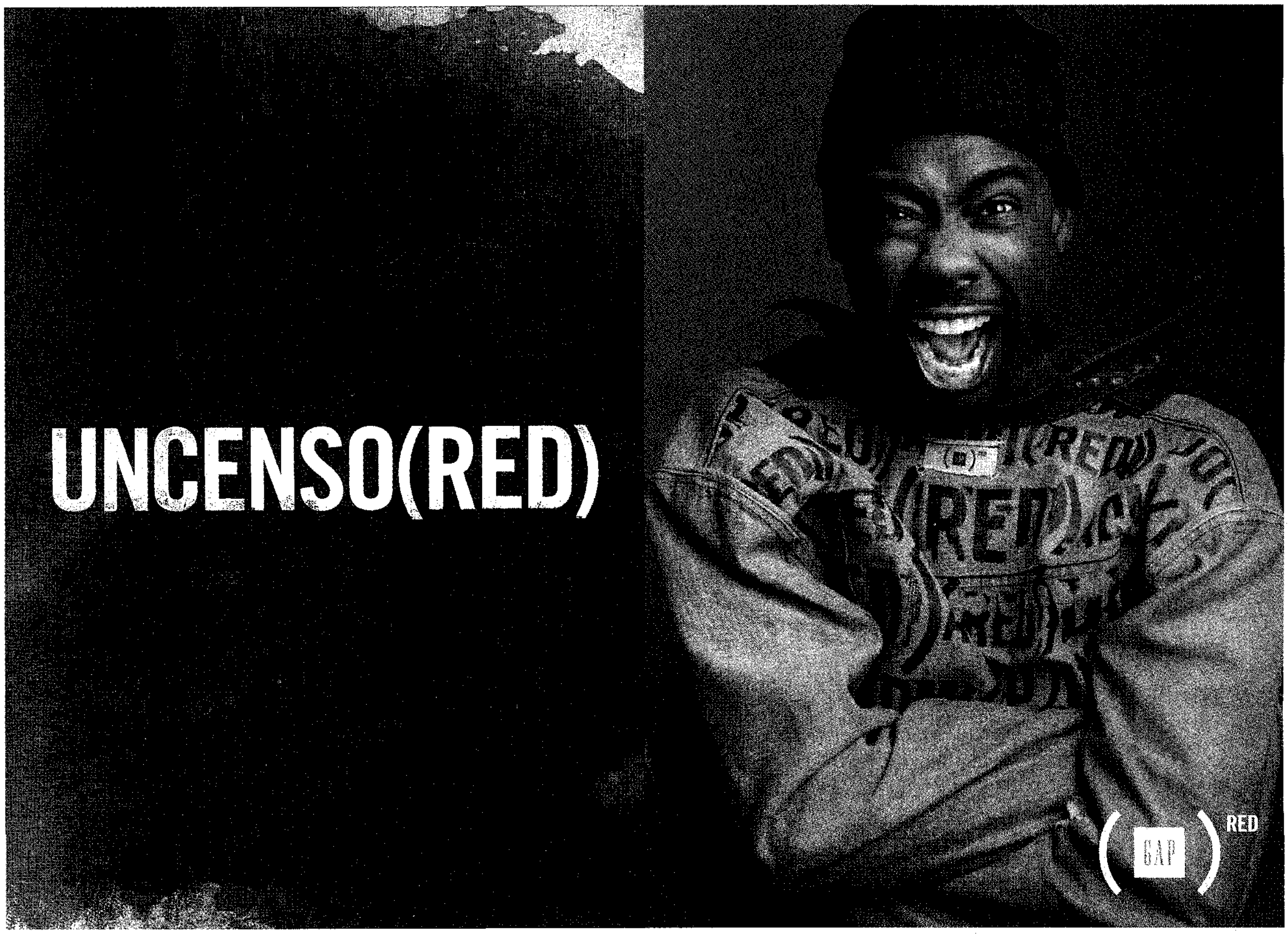
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. Oct. 4-10 at 9: "Blood Tea and Red String" (2006, Christiane Cegavske).

SUNSHINE CINEMA

143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Oct. 6-7: "Stop Making Sense" (1984, Jonathan Demme).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"50 Years of Janus Films," a New York Film Festival sidebar. Oct. 4 at 2: "Knife in the Water" (1962, Roman Polanski; in Polish). ♦ Oct. 4 at 4 and 8:30 and Oct. 5 at 6: "The 400 Blows" (1959, François Truffaut; in French) and "Antoine and Colette" (1962, Truffaut; in French). ♦ Oct. 4 at 6:30 and Oct. 5 at 2: "The Cranes Are Flying" (1957, Mikhail Kalatozov; in Russian). ♦ Oct. 5 at 4 and 9: "Monika" (1953, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ Oct. 6 at 2 and 6:15 and Oct. 9 at 8:30: "La Strada" (1954, Federico Fellini; in Italian). ♦ Oct. 6 at 4:15: "WR: Mysteries of the Organism" (1971, Dušan Makavejev; in Serbo-Croatian). ♦ Oct. 10 at 2 and 9:10: "Beauty and the Beast" (1946, Jean Cocteau; in French). ♦ Oct. 10 at 4: "The Organizer" (†). ♦ Oct. 10 at 6:30: "The Makioka Sisters" (1983, Kon Ichikawa; in Japanese). ♦ Films by Alejandro Jodorowsky. Oct. 6 at 9: "El Topo" (1970; in Spanish). ♦ Oct. 7 at midnight: "The Holy Mountain" (1973; in English and Spanish). ♦ "Views from the Avant-Garde." Oct. 7 at 12:30: "The Great Divide," a short-film program including "Liberté et Patrie" (†). ♦ Oct. 7 at 3:15: Short films by Saul Levine (1967-83). ♦ Oct. 7 at 5:30: "... Dissolves Into Air," short films by Stan Brakhage, Nathaniel Dorsky, and others. ♦ Oct. 7 at 8:15: Films by Kenneth Anger, introduced by the director. ♦ Oct. 8 at 1: "Above and Below," short films by Ken Jacobs, Bruce Conner, and others. ♦ Oct. 8 at 3:30: Short films by Paolo Gioli. ♦ Oct. 8 at 6: Films by Ernie Gehr. ♦ Oct. 8 at 8:30: "Mind and Matter," short films by Stan Brakhage, Paul Sharits, Luther Price, and others.



READINGS AND TALKS

"SECRET SCIENCE CLUB"
This lecture series in the basement of the swank Park Slope bar Union Hall presents the molecular biologist Lee M. Silver on Oct. 4 at 7. The author of "Challenging Nature" and "Remaking Eden" will talk about cloning, stem-cell research, and the responsible use of biotechnology. The local composer and musician Bradford Reed, the creator of a ten-stringed instrument called the pencilina, will also appear. (702 Union St., at Fifth Ave., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary.)

92ND STREET Y
Oct. 4 at 8: Cindy Sheehan, the Iraq-war activist, and Eve Ensler, the author of "The Vagina Monologues," discuss the impact of political protests. Oct. 10 at 8: The artist Gary Panter talks shop with Matt Groening, the man behind "The Simpsons." (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

CLAIRE MESSUD
The novelist reads from her latest book, "The Emperor's Children," about a trio of not so recent Brown graduates who are adrift in New York City. (192 Books, Tenth Ave. between 21st and 22nd Sts. For reservations, which are required, call 212-255-4022. Oct. 5 at 7.)

"BREAKING OPEN: CELEBRATING THE LIFE AND WORK OF MURIEL RUKEYSER"
Poets House, the downtown library and literary center, presents a tribute to the late poet and activist, with Jan Heller Levi, an editor of "A Muriel Rukeyser Reader," and the poets Suzanne Gardinier, Adrienne Rich, and Hugh Seidman. (Davis Auditorium, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. No tickets necessary. Oct. 5 at 8.)

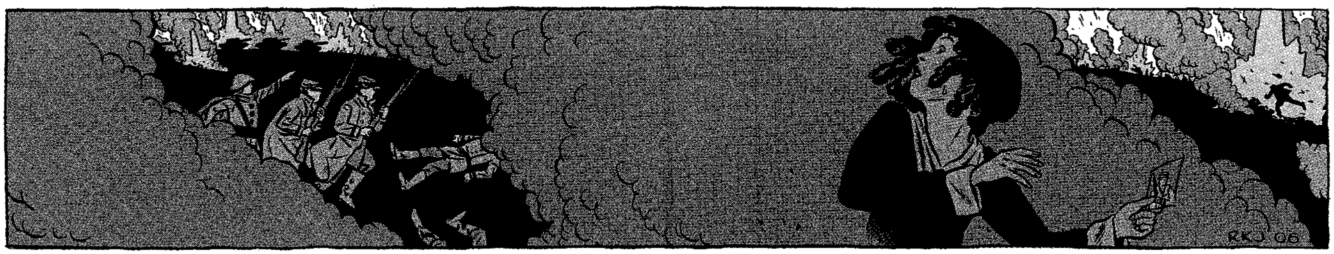
"ARTISTS TALK ON ART"
The contemporary Chinese artists Xu Bing, Zhang Jianjun, and Lin Yilin discuss their work with the art critic and curator Christopher Phillips. (School of Visual Arts, 209 E. 23rd St., 3rd fl. Tickets at the door. Oct. 6 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

THE NEW YORKER FESTIVAL
The annual gathering of contributors to the magazine takes place Oct. 6-8. Many events are sold out, but, as of press time, others still have tickets available. A partial list follows. Oct. 7 at 8:30: Lawrence Wright performs a staged monologue based on his research for his new book, "The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11." (37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St.) Oct. 7 at 10: Jon Lee Anderson interviews the Argentinean musician Gustavo Santaolalla, who wrote the score to "Brokeback Mountain." (Cedar Lake Dance Studios, 547 W. 26th St.) Oct. 8 at 10 A.M.: A talk by the writer and musician Mohammed Naseehu Ali about the complicated status of prophets in our world. (37 Arts.) (For a complete schedule, visit festival.newyorker.com.)

"OPENHOUSENEWYORK"
Once a year for the past three years, the city's hidden corners and otherwise inaccessible architectural treasures have become, for a weekend, open to all. This year, the focus is on sustainable design, and about thirty of the more than a hundred and eighty sites are places that have been built with an eye toward the future of design and of the planet as a whole. They include a bakery in the East Village with walls made of wheat, the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Visitor Contact Station, which incorporates green design, and Solar One, New York's first stand-alone solar-powered building. (For more information, visit www.ohny.org. Oct. 7-8.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
The crowd at **Christie's** this week may be a little zanier than usual: on Oct. 5-7, the house holds the first "official" auction of "Star Trek" memorabilia from the CBS Paramount Television studios, timed to mark the fortieth anniversary of the series's début. For about the price of a Lanvin cocktail dress, you could go home with an authentic Starfleet minidress; for considerably more, you could acquire, at a sale of jewelry on Oct. 10, one of the awe-inspiring jewels—including a twenty-three-carat oval-cut diamond ring made by the legendary Place Vendôme jeweller JAR—from the collection of the recently divorced actress Ellen Barkin. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ The West Coast designer Craig Wright, having completed what may be his last house, has decided to empty out his ample closets: **Sotheby's** presents a sale of his furniture and decorations (Oct. 4), which features an Italian baroque-style bed reminiscent of Bernini's *baldacchino* in St. Peter's Basilica. A sale featuring items from the Dundas collection of American Indian art from the Northwest Coast (Oct. 5), amassed in 1863 by the Scottish reverend Robert J. Dundas, contains several hauntingly beautiful pieces, including a delicately rendered Tsimshian wooden mask depicting the face of a shaman. The next two days (Oct. 6-7) feature Americana, from weathervanes to grandfather clocks; the first day is devoted to a sale of items from the collection of Josephine Ford (Henry's granddaughter) and her husband, Walter Buhl Ford II. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)



R. KIKUO JOHNSON

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
CINEMA MUTO
Oct. 20-22

Silent movies have a festival of their own in Pordenone, Italy, which offers many important rediscoveries and restorations. BAM presents a weekend of treasures from the 2005 edition, including D. W. Griffith's First World War drama "Hearts of the World," starring Lillian and Dorothy Gish; Victor Sjöström's "The Scarlet Letter," with Lillian Gish as Hester Prynne; and a 1913 version of Émile Zola's "Germinal." (718-636-4100.)

NIGHT LIFE
SCHOOL OF ROCK
Oct. 31-Nov. 4

More than a thousand bands descend upon the city for the twenty-sixth annual CMJ Music Marathon. This year, one of the many discussion panels will investigate the resurgence of heavy metal. (www.cmj.com.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
BEAUTIFUL BAVARIA
Nov. 3

In the first of three concerts at Carnegie Hall, the renowned Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, under the firm command of Mariss Jansons, performs works by Shostakovich and Strauss, including the "Four Last Songs," which will feature the radiant voice and glamorous presence of the Finnish soprano Karita Mattila. (212-247-7800.)

THE THEATRE
POLI-SCI CLASS
Nov. 9

Julianne Moore makes her Broadway début in the world première of "The Vertical Hour," by David Hare, at the Music Box. Bill Nighy also stars in the political drama, as a British man whose post-9/11 world view unexpectedly affects that of an American war correspondent turned college professor (Moore). Sam Mendes directs. (212-239-6200.)

ART
NEUE SACHLICHKEIT
Nov. 14-Feb. 19

The Weimar-era preference for unflinching honesty, at least when it came to casting an artistic eye on other people, will be documented in the hundred-odd paintings and works on paper in the Met's upcoming show "Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s." (212-535-7710.)

D. W. Griffith's "Hearts of the World," at BAM.

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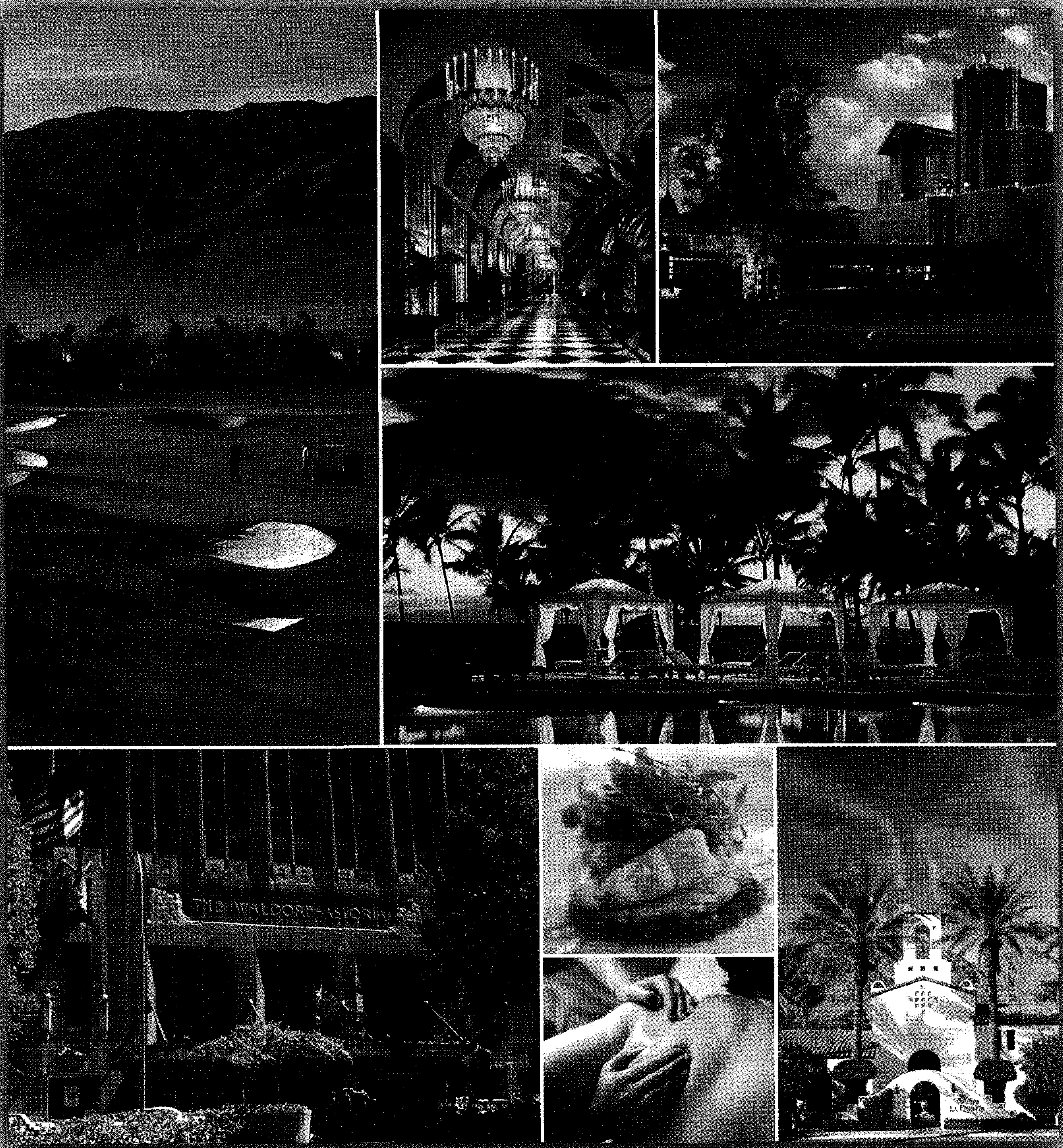

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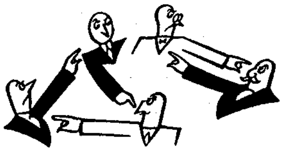
THE
NEW YORKER

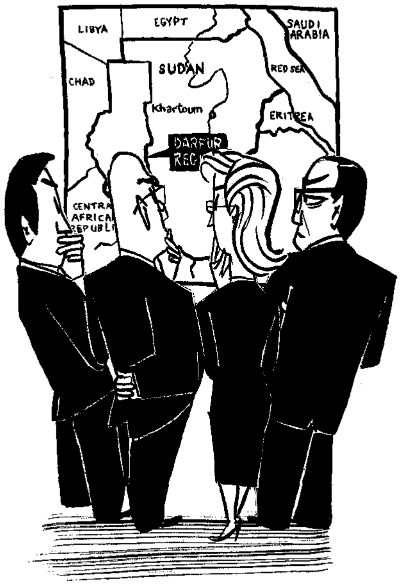
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
INTERNATIONAL INACTION



Darfur—the world's gravest humanitarian disaster, lately deteriorating, and likely to get much worse in the coming weeks—perfectly reveals the international politics of the moment, showing all the principal actors as they are, rather than as they would like to appear. The pictures aren't flattering. Since 2004, the Bush Administration has declared the death of several hundred thousand people in Darfur to be a case of genocide, but it has devoted only fitful rhetorical outrage and even more fitful attention to the subject. It has declined to offer any American contribution to a United Nations peacekeeping force in Darfur, even though President Bush scolded the opening session of the General Assembly last month, saying that the U.N.'s "credibility" is on the line. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, meanwhile, met with representatives of governments at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, in New York, and, according to the Washington *Post*, "renewed her call for Sudan to halt a military offensive in Darfur and yield to international pressure to allow more than 20,000 U.N. peacekeepers to protect civilians there." The Bush Administration still seems to imagine that the world will jump when America tells it to. But at the U.N. the world wasn't jumping. If anything, it was laughing.

The heads of state having the best time on their recent visit to New York were those newly emboldened, largely by America's failure in Iraq, to appoint themselves tribunes of the world's oppressed: Hugo Chavez, the strutting caudillo of Venezuela; Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the messianic President of Iran; and Omar Hassan al-Bashir, Sudan's military dictator, whose years in office have seen the war-related deaths of two and a half million of his fellow-Sudanese. Bashir has threatened to wage a jihad if U.N. peacekeepers enter Darfur, and in New York he declared the reports of massacres to be "fictions" perpetrated by greedy humanitarian groups and Zionist Jews. Before the war on terror and the invasion of Iraq and the Danish cartoons, President Bashir would have found it difficult to attract much of an audience for his arguments. Today, Darfur as a Jewish-Scandinavian hoax could have legs.



Until recently, it was striking how little the élites of nearby Islamic capitals like Khartoum, Rabat, and Cairo knew or cared about the slaughter of Muslims in Darfur. It almost made their denunciations of civilian deaths in Iraq and Lebanon seem like selective outrage. That has begun to change, though not the way one might expect. Last month, an Egyptian lawyer explained to the *Times* why Muslim sentiment is so inflamed against the West. "The people embrace their Arab-Muslim identity and feel an injustice is done upon them in more than one place—Iraq, Palestine, Darfur, Afghanistan, Lebanon," he said. Darfur, where an Arab government unleashed Arab militias to commit massacres against Muslim African farmers, has joined the growing list of Arab grievances—against the West.

So it was all the more poignant to hear Jan Egeland, the top official at the U.N. for emergency relief and humanitarian affairs, who knows the awful stakes in Darfur as well as anyone, forced to appeal directly to Arab and Muslim leaders for help in persuading Sudan to allow U.N. peacekeepers into Darfur. "I'm telling non-Western powers to help us or else see that we collectively fail," he said. "They have to fight for us." Unfortunately, the non-Western powers care even less about Darfur than the Western

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

powers do. Arab governments stand behind the Sudanese regime. China, whose forty-per-cent interest in Sudanese oil gives it real leverage over the government in Khartoum, has both economic and strategic reasons to want to see America stymied by Sudan. Russia regards any U.N. intervention as a bad precedent for its own war crimes in Chechnya.

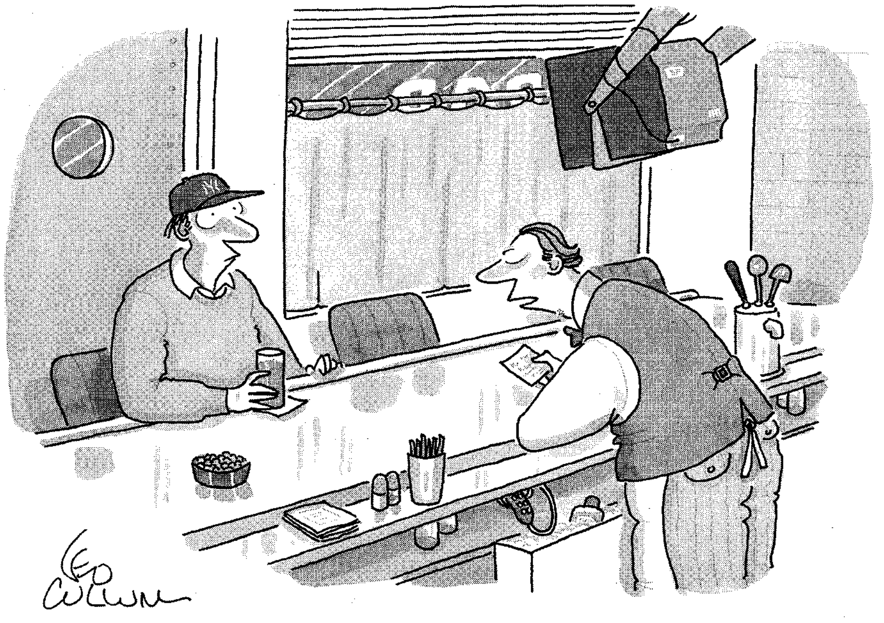
Egeland's only hope may be sub-Saharan Africa, where fear of genocidal slaughter outweighs resentment of Western imperialism. The African Union's seven-thousand-troop mission in Darfur, which was scheduled to be replaced by U.N. forces this month, is so undermanned, underequipped, and hampered by Sudanese interference that it can do little more than watch the tragedy unfold. At the U.N., some African leaders urged an intervention in Darfur with or without Sudan's permission. But since when does the world listen to Africans? Unless Ivorians and Congolese start blowing themselves up in front of Western embassies and shops, it seems, their grievances won't be taken seriously. Kofi Annan, the first black African secretary-general, who has passionately called for action in Sudan, perhaps to redeem his earlier failures in Rwanda and Bosnia, will leave office in December, with the tragedy in Darfur, as he said, making "a mockery of our claim, as an international community, to shield people from the worst abuses." Last week, the front-runner to succeed Annan, Ban Ki-moon, of South Korea, wouldn't even apply the word "genocide" to Rwanda. He seemed ready to follow the geopolitical winds.

International intervention as a means of stopping mass slaughter has never had many supporters, other than an idealistic minority in the West and the desperate people in need of rescue. But in Kosovo and in East Timor in the late nineteen-nineties it had its moment. The results were decidedly mixed, but the worst was prevented or stopped. Intervention required an unlikely combination of propitious circumstances on the ground, political will in world capitals, and a kind of moral legitimacy that was able to override the self-serving objections of ethnically or economically interested parties. In Darfur, the circumstances are confused and complex, with the rebel groups turning on one another and much of the violence indistinguishable from banditry. After three years, Darfur is starting to look less like Rwanda and more like Congo, and no intervention will end the fighting by force.

But there are steps that Washington could take to prevent Khartoum from allowing a new slaughter, of the two million civilians clustered in relief camps; for example, targeting the assets of Sudanese leaders, whose lifeblood, as John Prendergast, of the International Crisis Group, points out, flows from shell companies and fraudulent charities set up to siphon off the country's new oil wealth.

It would require not only political will but diplomatic finesse for the U.S. to harness Europe, pressure China, and empower Africa to isolate Khartoum and undermine its support in the Arab world. The lack of such will is normal in a great power confronted with the suffering of people in faraway, unimportant regions; it is a recurring theme in twentieth-century American history. The collapse of moral legitimacy is more recent.

—*George Packer*



"How about we settle your tab from the regular season?"

REUNION ON THE TRIB

When a hundred or so veterans of the New York *Herald Tribune* showed up the other night at their former headquarters to mark the fortieth anniversary of the newspaper's demise, the most conspicuously absent fixtures (other than, say, the peerless Red Smith or the elegantly wry Charles Portis or the legendary city editor Stanley Walker) were the printing presses. From 1924 to 1966, the *Trib* occupied eight floors at 230 West Forty-first Street. The publisher John Hay Whitney's private dining room was on eight, business offices were on six and seven, the city room was on five, makeup on four, presses on three and two, delivery trucks on one—the whole news enterprise laced with pneumatic tubes and animated by the conviction that, in a town teeming with dailies, the *Trib* was the best written and best edited and, except on lousy days, the most fun.

Guests emerged from elevators on the third floor and, instead of pulsating noise and the aromas of ink, oil, and solvent, found a pleasantly humming, mostly white-haired crowd, polishing well-travelled anecdotes in freshly renovated space now occupied by the new graduate school of journalism of the City University of New York. In other words, the setting was unrecognizable. To avoid the same problem with each other, everyone wore a nametag—the indispensable at any reunion, along with medicinal refreshments.

For more than a decade after the paper closed—the *final* final edition was printed April 24, 1966—annual gatherings were held at Bleeck's, the conveniently situated refuge once described by a feature writer as "a stein's throw from the *Herald Trib.*" After a fire at Bleeck's, the venue shifted to Sardi's. The thirtieth was held at the incongruously sedate Century Association, and at that point everyone decided that it was time to stop being sentimental.

The coincidence of the fortieth anniversary and the opening of the new journalism school, however, seemed irresistible. The school's dean, Stephen Shepard, delivered welcoming remarks, in which he noted that CUNY offers the only publicly funded graduate school of journalism in the Northeast. Another speaker was Richard Wald, the *Trib's* last managing editor, who observed that the school "will try to do a lot of things that you can't do anymore. You can't do an apprenticeship at a newspaper anymore. You've got to go to school."

Later, Wald listened as Martin Steadman, Fred Ferretti, and Maurice Carroll—who, at the end, were, respectively, the *Trib's* investigative-unit chief, City Hall bureau chief, and a national reporter—stood near the elevator and tried to figure out where they would have been situated in the old offices. Carroll suggested the men's room, Steadman said it was closer to the morgue, and Wald reminded them that they were envisioning the fifth floor rather than the third. Steadman then remembered a story about the less lamented New York *Daily Mirror*.

"Jim Bishop told this to me when we worked together at the *Journal American*," Steadman said. "The *Daily Mirror* was on East Forty-fifth. Bishop was doing rewrite on the night shift. The elevator opened right in the city room. This young fellow walks off the elevator. He has a gun in his hand, blood all over his shirt. The first desk he comes to is Jim Hurley's. Hurley was the hunting-and-fishing editor. The guy says to him, 'I came home and found my wife in bed with another guy. So I shot her. I want to turn myself in.' And Hurley says, 'This is outdoor sports. Indoor sports is over there.'"

"I've got one," Ferretti said. "From the *Herald Tribune*. Edmund Gilligan. Rod-and-gun editor. He's out of a British movie—roundish fellow, florid, bald with a monk's tonsure, red going gray. Full reddish mustache. Always wore tweeds with leather at the elbows. Liked his booze. He came in one evening, after the first edition had gone to bed. There was a hallway where you came in from the elevator, then a wall of mailboxes to your right as the city room opened up to your left. He got to the mailboxes and stood there with his hands at his sides, and when he raised his arms we noticed that he was carrying a rifle. He turned very deliberately and aimed. Started at his right and panned ever so slowly around the room. Everybody was diving under desks. Then, when he got to his far left, he put the gun down to his side, never said a word, and walked out the way he came in. And we all went back to work."

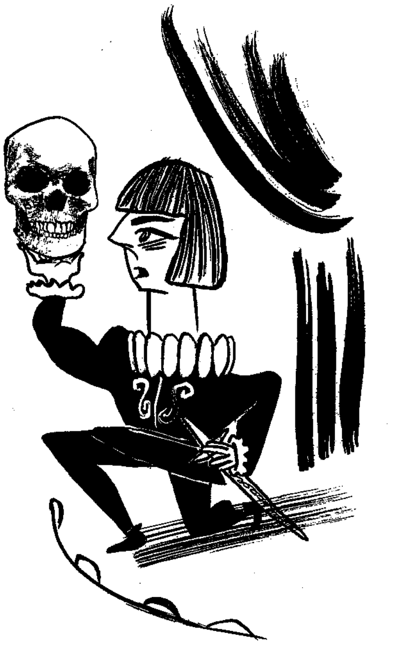
—*Mark Singer*

AFTERLIFE DEPT.
SKULDUGGERY

In 1999, as Del Close lay in a Chicago hospital with terminal emphysema, he was still troubleshooting his plan to outwit death. Close, the improv-comedy guru whose students included Bill Murray and Mike Myers, had made provisions in his will for his skull to go to the city's Goodman Theatre, so that he could play Yorick in "Hamlet." Now he took the hand of Charna Halpern, his longtime creative partner and executor, and said, "Promise me you'll make that skull thing happen, no matter what." She promised. After Close died, Halpern presented the Goodman with his cranium, and the former Merry Prankster's second act—the skull has appeared onstage in "Arcadia," "Pericles," and "I Am My Own Wife"—soon became a Chicago legend.

In July, however, the Chicago *Tribune* published an article suggesting that the skull at the Goodman belonged to someone else. The article pointed out that the screws holding the skull together are rusty with age; that the skull has a hole at the top indicating prior service as part of a teaching skeleton, and an incision where the brain was removed for autopsy (which Close's wasn't); and that it has eleven teeth (Close wore dentures). Nonetheless, Halpern insisted to the paper that the skull was Close's.

She now pleads guilty—with an explanation. "After Del died, I asked the hospital people if they would help me by taking off the head, and they just laughed," she said recently. "They suggested I call the Illinois Society of Pathologists. I told the pathologists, 'I will give you Del's body, and it's a great body, because you can study the effects of smoking, alcohol, cocaine, and heroin on the brain. All I need is the skull.' They thought about it, and then said, 'There's a fine line between research and art, and we're concerned about our funding.' I called labs, researchers, anatomy shops, and it was 'No, no, no.'"



After two days, the hospital insisted that Halpern remove Close's body from the morgue, and she reluctantly had it cremated, head and all. A few days later, she went in search of a stand-in skull. Accompanied by her older sister, Bonnie Malow (the two always shop together), she drove to the Anatomical Chart Company, in Skokie, where they strolled among the skull-stocked shelves. "We were trying to match Del's big brain cavity and nice, high cheekbones," Halpern said. "We finally found one that you could buy as Del, if it were covered with skin." Malow confirmed: "It was a manly, manly skull."

At Malow's house, the sisters took turns plucking out the skull's canines and incisors. "We left the ones in the back, because it turns out that pulling teeth is like pulling teeth," Halpern said. "Plus, who's going to look back there?"

After stashing the skull in her pantry

for four months—“I had heard that maggots have to eat the flesh off a skull to prepare it, so I waited a while”—Halpern gave it to the Goodman in an elaborate ceremony. “Then I got a call from the guy at the cremation society saying the press had been asking, ‘Did the body arrive without a head?,’ and I thought, Oh, shit, I am such a bad criminal! But he’d covered for me.”

Since the *Tribune* took a closer look at the skull, Halpern has been confronted by a number of Close’s friends and fans. She tells them that the substitution was never intended as a hoax: “Del and I were improvisers, and improvisers always say yes to each other’s ideas onstage, make them work.” After the *Tribune* story ran, Halpern said, “My impulse was to find another skull, one without a hole in it, and then call and say, ‘Yes, that’s a fake skull—but I have the real one.’ Try to keep it all going.”

The Goodman’s artistic director, Robert Falls, believes that Halpern kept her promise. “I imagine it’s very difficult to cut somebody’s head off and get it cleaned up,” he said. The skull remains on Falls’s office bookshelf, and he continues to tell visitors the romantic, un-fact-checked version of its provenance. “The skull has no bookings at the moment, but it will,” he said. “Del always told me, ‘As a working actor, I’ll accept any role—even if you just toss me into a desert scene with other vulture-picked bones, that would be great.’”

—*Tad Friend*

THE ARTISTIC LIFE
WOMEN ON FILM

The photographer Lillian Bassman is an irreverent beauty of eighty-nine whose fashion pictures from the heyday of couture—the late nineteen-forties to the late nineteen-sixties—were influential in animating a stilted genre. In an era of artistic appropriations, Bassman is a self-appropriator. Her late works (on show at the Staley-Wise Gallery, in SoHo, until the end of the month) incorporate her earliest inspirations, those absorbed by a teen-aged free spirit from the Bronx who, in the nineteen-thirties, danced with Martha Graham; posed nude at the Art Students League for fifty cents an hour; got arrested (as “Rosa Bonheur”) at a W.P.A. sit-down; and, with her boyfriend, Paul Himmel, she said recently, “lived at the Met for most of the Depression—that was our entertainment.”

Those frugal dates gave Bassman an opportunity to study the way the Old Masters represented women’s flesh and draperies, and “I lost my mind,” she said, “to the elongated figures of El Greco.” But the austerities of the period never chastened her enthusiasm for high style. Her mother and Himmel’s mother—both “lefty bohemians like me”—made most of her clothes, a “gorgeously eccentric” wardrobe of flowing capes, jodhpurs, and clingy, hand-knitted dresses “with the kind of sexy, magpie swagger that kids have today.” She and Himmel married, “for practical reasons,” in 1935—“the bourgeois institution was against our principles”—and eventually had two children. Himmel, a noted photographer and psychotherapist, is now ninety-two. “We’re either very boring or very well-mated,” Bassman said.

An injury ended Bassman’s career in dance, and she gave up painting “because it was too slow, and I discovered I could ‘paint’ more expressively in a darkroom.” In 1941, she landed an internship at *Harper’s Bazaar*, assisting the art director Alexey Brodovich. She became his co-art director at *Junior Bazaar*, and he encouraged her photography. In her six decades behind the camera, she produced magazine covers and big ad campaigns, but she also enjoyed a moment of renown as the designer who, she said, “dreamed up the concept of a ‘one-size-fits-all’ garment.” Henri Bendel carried the line for four years.

On a recent visit to the couple’s carriage house, Bassman was dressed in the uniform—a crisp man’s shirt from Goodwill, black yoga trousers, and vintage saddle shoes—that she adopted when proto-hippie finery ceased to suit her. She wears her white hair pulled back severely, a bit of pink lip gloss to accentuate her blue eyes, and a tan from Fire Island, where she and Himmel have spent weekends since 1946. “We used to rent a house there with Dick Avedon and his first wife, Doe,” she said. “We were wild young things who loved drinking and dancing until four in the morning—Paul and I once won a bottle of champagne in a tango contest—and we sometimes went swimming straight from the bar.” When *Bazaar* sent Avedon to Paris for six weeks in 1947, he invited Bassman to make use of his idle studio. “Dick’s assistant initially did the technical work, but as a dancer I understood movement, and as a woman I understood models,” she said. “I landed a big lingerie account, and underwear became one of my specialties.” One of her most famous images, lit like a Vermeer, shows a barefoot maiden in frilly knickers at a curtained window, her face veiled by a slip.

Bassman did some sittings for *Bazaar* that featured evening gowns by Fath, Galanos, and Dior; Chanel once offered to make her a suit, “but, like an idiot, I told her I was too heavy.” Carmel Snow, the editor-in-chief of *Bazaar*, “quickly discovered that I had a gift for making cheap or dowdy Seventh Avenue clothes look like couture, so she sent me all her ‘problems,’ ” she continued. “The real luxury was working with mature pros like Barbara Mullen, or great dancers like Tanaquil Le Clercq, whose experience of real life showed on their faces. On a shoot a few years ago, I arrived to find a fourteen-year-old, built like a wire hanger and with no expression. I couldn’t reach her, and I think the pictures show it.”

Bassman “retired” from magazine and commercial work in 1971 to concentrate on art photography, and she threw out thirty years’ worth of negatives. Some were recovered in 1992 by her downstairs neighbor, Helen Frankenthaler, in forgotten garbage bags, and they rekindled Bassman’s interest in her past. Her new show consists of large-format black-and-white diptychs, each of which juxtaposes an isolated flower with a “reinvented” fashion photograph from her archives. She manipulates the pictures to blur or burn out the detail, transforming a literal image into a painterly abstraction.

Snow once reproached Bassman for being too arty: “ ‘You’re here to show buttons and bows,’ she snapped at me. But I think my contribution to the genre has been to photograph fashion with a woman’s eye for a woman’s intimate feelings.” Bassman’s women—perennially soulful, elusively chic—have the poignance of an endangered species.

—*Judith Thurman*

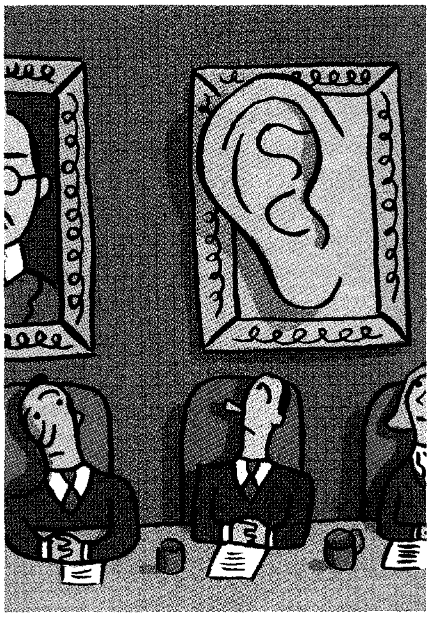
THE FINANCIAL PAGE

ZIP IT

Ever since the news broke that investigators working for Hewlett-Packard had engaged in a series of unsavory (and possibly illegal) tactics in an attempt to discover which members of its board of directors were leaking information to the press, attention has focussed on the scandalous investigative methods that were used. This isn't surprising: the decision to sic the gumshoes on the leakers was an act of spectacularly bad judgment, and the consequences have been appropriately severe. HP's chairman of the board resigned, California's attorney general claims that he has enough evidence for indictments, and last week Congress allocated two full days of hearings to the subject. Amid the uproar, though, something important has been forgotten: the leaks were a serious problem. HP was wrong to resort to Plumbers-style snooping but right to think that the leaks needed plugging.

Leaks from a company's board of directors are a problem because they magnify the decision-making flaws that have plagued boards for their entire institutional history. Boards are supposed to be vigilant monitors of management and stewards of long-term strategy. But, as Franklin Gevurtz, a law professor at University of the Pacific, has shown in a recent article, there have always been complaints about the supine nature of boards and the unwillingness (or inability) of directors to actually direct. In "The Way We Live Now," published in 1875, Anthony Trollope describes a board meeting at the company run by the fraudster Melmotte: "Melmotte himself would speak a few slow words . . . always indicative of triumph, and then everybody would agree to everything, somebody would sign something, and the 'Board' . . . would be over." Not much had changed by 1971, when the Harvard Business School professor Myles Mace said that most directors were little more than "ornaments on a corporate Christmas tree." And, historically, boards were often packed with corporate insiders and cronies of management. (When Michael Eisner was the C.E.O. of Disney, his board for years included his personal attorney and the architect who designed his house.)

Over the past two decades, though, and especially after the major corporate scandals of 2001 and 2002, much effort has gone into improving board performance. A checklist of good board characteristics—not having the C.E.O. also serve as chairman of the board, increasing the number of outside directors, and so on—has been put to use. Since 2001, the number of new independent directors appointed at major corporations has risen sharply, and more than eighty per cent of all directors now qualify as independent.



MARC ROSENTHAL

These are welcome improvements, but they're not enough to reform boards. (Enron's board, after all, was full of independent directors.) Successful boards require what Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, a professor at the Yale School of Management, calls "a culture of open dissent," where members are free to criticize the C.E.O. and each other, and where there is no artificial attempt to impose consensus on the group. This is hard to achieve, because dissenting opinions often get interpreted as personal attacks. Social scientists like to say that good decision-making groups engage in "task conflict," fighting over the best solutions to particular problems, while bad ones engage in "relationship conflict," interpreting differences of opinion as differences of character. But, as Tony Simons and Randall Peterson, of Cornell, mention in a study of seventy top management teams, groups that engage in "task conflict" also often suffer from "relationship conflict." In other words, it seems you can be collegial and friendly and make bad decisions, or you can be locked in a room with people who can't stand each other and make better decisions.

Simons and Peterson identified a surprisingly simple way out of this dilemma: trust. They found that groups whose members trusted one another's competence and integrity were more likely to engage in task conflict without succumbing to relationship conflict. Paradoxically, the more people trust one another, the more willing they are to fight with each other. And this is why the leaks at H.P. were a problem: they undermined the sense of trust and solidarity that a board needs to be effective. The original leaks came in 2005, when the board was debating the future of its then C.E.O., Carly Fiorina, and they were clearly an attempt to spin the debate over Fiorina toward the position the leaker favored. In other words, they were meant to bring outside pressures to bear on board decisions, and to put the interests of individuals above those of the group. The later leak, which provided details of long-term strategy discussions at a board retreat, was relatively anodyne, but it violated an agreement that board members had made not to disclose private information, and so insured further erosion of trust. In addition, the violations of confidentiality have made people less likely to speak openly. The leaks both magnified the possibility of relationship conflict and diminished the chances of open dissent.

In some contexts, leakers can foster independent thought and thwart nefarious cover-ups—as in, say, the case of the Pentagon Papers—and whistleblowers have often exposed unethical or illegal corporate behavior. But in the boardroom the usual effect of leaks is to stifle independent thinking and encourage cautious, self-protective opinions. They also make it more likely that C.E.O.s will once again try to fill boards with cronies whose main qualification is the ability to keep their mouths shut. Loose lips don't just sink ships. They can put a pretty good dent in companies, too.

—*James Surowiecki*

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DEPT. OF AMPLIFICATION

TALL FOR ITS AGE

Climbing a record-breaking redwood.

BY RICHARD PRESTON

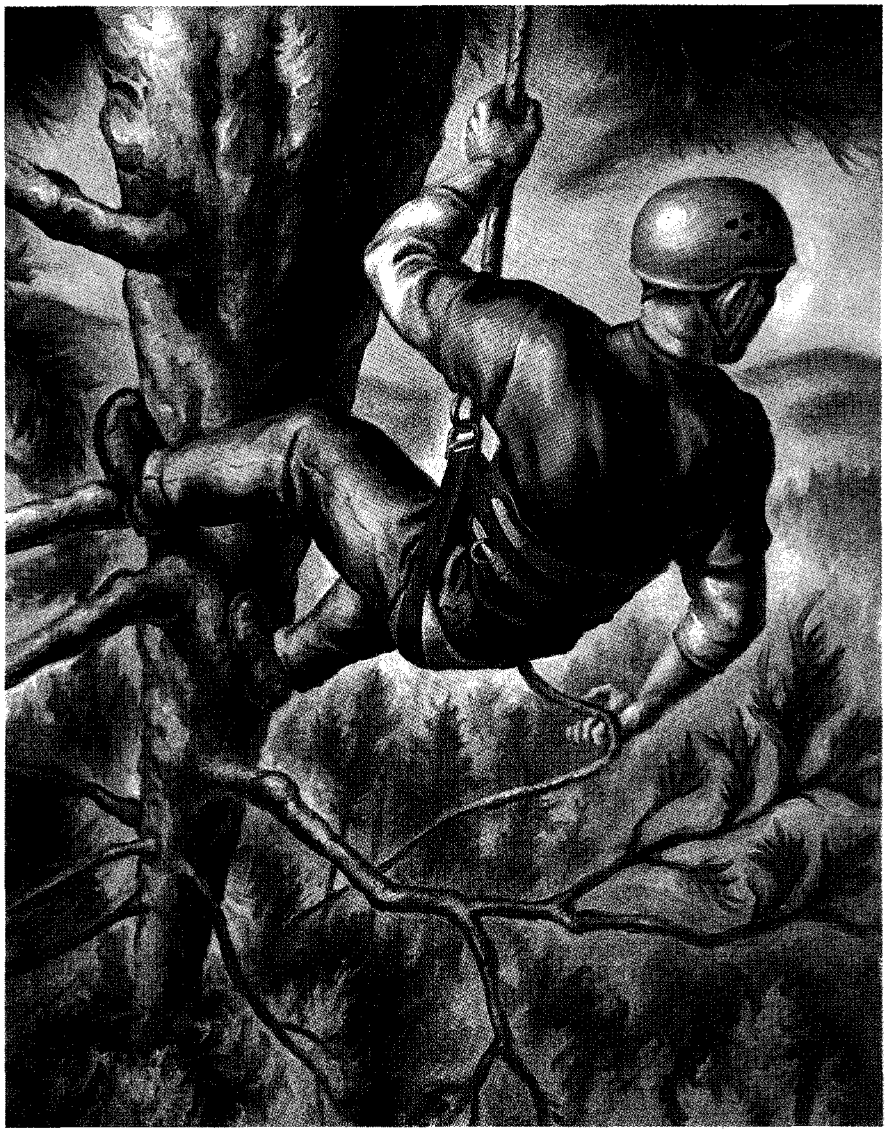
Before the world's tallest tree, a coast redwood, was discovered this past summer, most people assumed that California had been pretty much explored. On July 1st, two amateur naturalists named Chris K. Atkins and Michael Taylor were bushwhacking in a remote stretch of Redwood National Park, in Humboldt County, near the coast of Northern California. The park is a temperate rain forest crossed by dozens of small creeks that wander through tight, winding V-shaped canyons, which are sometimes referred to as notch valleys. Atkins and Taylor found their way into a valley that may not have had human visitors in thirty years. (Timbermen had probably been there during the seventies.) There they discovered a magnificent, previously unidentified grove of giant redwoods. In the grove grew a tree that was extraordinarily tall, even by redwood standards, springing out of a slope. Both men had handheld laser range finders, which can be used to quickly estimate the height of a tall tree. The readings indicated that the tree was about three hundred and seventy-five feet tall—five feet taller than the tallest known tree, a redwood called the Stratosphere Giant, which Atkins had found six years before. The naturalists named the tree Helios, after the Greek god of the sun. Near it, they found another tree, a darning needle of a redwood with a dead, sun-bleached top that looked like driftwood, which the laser readings indicated might be three hundred and seventy-one feet tall—taller than the Stratosphere Giant but shorter than Helios—making it, perhaps, the world's second-tallest tree. They named it Icarus. "Icarus flew too close to the sun and got burned," Taylor said a few days after their discovery.

If the tallest tree were anywhere, it would be in California. The coast redwood, or *Sequoia sempervirens*, which is most often simply called the redwood, is a massive conifer, of ancient lineage. The trunk of a redwood is a tapering, grooved cylinder that can measure up to thirty feet in diameter near the ground, and it can soar upward for more than two hundred feet—twenty stories—before the first limbs appear. The crown of a giant redwood is a cloudlike plume that can rise to more than thirty-five stories above the ground. Today, virtually all the living giant redwoods exist inside a handful of small state parks, and in Redwood National Park, along California's north coast. The tallest trees that aren't redwoods—Douglas firs, in the Pacific Northwest, and *Eucalyptus regnans*, of southern Australia—can be slightly more than three hundred feet tall.

The redwood rain forest occupies a steep, mazelike terrain, jammed with trunks and vegetation. It is considered by some botanists to be among the densest kinds of rain forest on earth, rivalling those of southern Chile and east-central Peru in its resistance to humans trying to move through it on foot. The land can slope more than sixty degrees, and in many places there seems to be no solid ground, nothing to stand on but a tangle of fallen redwood branches and debris. Downed redwood trunks, ten or twelve feet in diameter, lie across one another like pickup sticks. A person trying to climb over a jumble of trunks could slip into a gap, fall thirty feet down into the center, break a leg, and never be heard from again.

The laser range finders of the type that Atkins and Taylor used can get a reading to within a few feet, but the only way to measure a very tall tree accurately is to climb it. Getting up to the top of a living structure taller than most office buildings is no trivial thing. One of the first people Atkins called after finding Helios was Stephen C. Sillett, a professor of botany at Humboldt State University, who is a friend of his. Sillett studies the redwood-forest canopy—the portion of the redwood forest that extends in the air—by climbing the trees. He began to assemble a team to make the first ascent of Helios, and invited me to join it. (Last year, I wrote an article for this magazine about Sillett, and during the course of reporting I learned how to climb redwoods.)

On August 25th, while Sillett was still planning the climb, Atkins and Taylor penetrated another notch valley, and discovered a redwood that was even taller than Helios. It, too, was growing on a slope. They named it Hyperion, after the Titan who was the father of Helios. Using their lasers, they estimated that Hyperion was close to three hundred and eighty feet tall. The tree's apparent height stunned them. Sillett and the others decided that they would climb Hyperion first, and find out how tall it really was.


The tallest redwoods test the limits of the possible for the height of any plant.

OWEN SMITH

For years, scientists believed that the world's tallest tree was a redwood discovered in 1963 by Paul A. Zahl, a naturalist and writer with *National Geographic*. At the time, timber companies owned most of the redwood forest, and only about fifteen per cent of the old-growth tracts—those with mature redwoods that are anywhere from five hundred to twenty-five hundred years old—remained standing. (Today, about four per cent is left.) Melville Bell Grosvenor, who was then the head of the National Geographic Society, seems to have thought that if an extremely tall redwood, perhaps even the world's tallest tree, could be discovered on timber-company land it would strengthen the conservationists' case for federal protection of the redwoods. The tallest known tree was the three-hundred-and-fifty-six-foot Rockefeller Tree, discovered in 1957, in Humboldt Redwoods State Park (about an hour's drive south of Redwood National Park). "Keep your eyes open," Grosvenor said to Zahl. "It would be wonderful to find a record-breaker."

Zahl decided to explore the Redwood Creek valley, in Humboldt County. He carried with him an Abney level, a small, disk-shaped instrument that can estimate height. One day, he followed a logging road and spotted a grove of strikingly tall redwoods growing in a bend of the creek. On the opposite bank, logging crews had clear-cut the slope. Zahl spent the next few days moving around in deep underbrush. When he found a tree that appeared to stand above the others, he phoned Grosvenor. *National Geographic* hired a team of surveyors to measure it as accurately as possible. Using a transit, they estimated that it was 367.8 feet tall. The National Geographic Society named it the Libbey Tree, in honor of Howard A. Libbey, the president of the Arcata Redwood Company, which owned the land and the tree. Libbey promised never to cut it down. The Libbey Tree came to be called the Tall Tree, and the grove in which it stands was named the Tall Trees Grove. Redwood National Park was created by an act of Congress in 1968, and it was centered on this grove. Sometime in the early nineteen-seventies, the top of the Tall Tree died, and later fell off. At that point, a redwood named the Dyerville Giant, in Humboldt Redwoods State Park, was thought to be the tallest, but surveyors couldn't agree on its height—they got readings that ranged from three hundred and fifty-eight feet to three hundred and sixty-nine feet—and in 1991 it fell down in a storm.

By the time the national park was formed, about two-thirds of the land in it had been logged. During the nineteen-seventies, as legislation to expand the park was being debated in Congress, the rate of logging increased dramatically in the adjacent, unprotected old-growth tracts, as timber companies rushed to cut down redwoods while they still could. Bulldozer roads, called cat tracks, began converging on the park. Timber crews worked twenty-four hours a day, using floodlights at night, in an effort to get the redwoods out before the government bought the land. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed the legisla-

INC(RED)IBLE

tion, and forty-eight thousand acres were added to Redwood National Park. By then, about eighty per cent of the land had been logged or was empty of redwoods, apart from very young trees that might, if left undisturbed, pass the two-hundred-foot mark in a couple of centuries. Even so, the addition to the park contained nine thousand acres of old-growth redwoods, tucked away in the deepest ravines and notch valleys, where the crews hadn't been able to push cat tracks. A mishmash of alder trees and tiny redwoods and Douglas firs grew on the logged land, surrounding and walling off the remnants of the ancient redwood forest. It was within these lost fragments of Eden that Atkins and Taylor searched for the world's tallest tree.

In July, 2000, Atkins discovered the Stratosphere Giant, growing on an alluvial flat in Humboldt Redwoods State Park. Not long afterward, Sillett made the first ascent of the Stratosphere Giant, along with a tree climber named James Spickler. (Redwood-canopy scientists climb in teams. "If you were by yourself in those trees and something went wrong, you'd be utterly screwed," Sillett told me. A person could get stuck thirty stories above the ground, with no way down.) Sillett and Spickler stretched a reel of fibreglass measuring tape from the topmost sprig of foliage to a point near the ground, and determined the height of the Stratosphere Giant to an accuracy of about an inch. It was 368.6 feet tall. Sillett began climbing and measuring the tree every year, with a botanist named Marie Antoine (Sillett and Antoine are married). They learned that it was growing between two and five inches a year.

The tallest redwoods exist at an outer limit of biology, on the edge of the possible for the height of any plant. Redwoods have the ability to bring moisture into their tops against the overwhelming pull of gravity, and scientists still aren't sure exactly how they do it. George Koch, an ecologist and plant physiologist at Northern Arizona University, said that to him the most exciting aspect of the discovery of Hyperion was that it was growing in a place no one had expected the tallest tree to be—on a slope, not in the more hospitable flat ground at the bottom of a valley. "It tells us that there's another kind of location where redwoods can grow to heights that approach their potential as organisms," he said. "I think there could probably have been four-hundred-foot redwoods."

Because it is pushing itself to an extreme, a very tall redwood may be sensitive to slight changes in the climate. The tallest trees, by the rate at which they grow from year to year—or by their failure to grow at all—may be able to reveal how forests are responding to increasing levels of carbon dioxide brought on by human activity, and the resulting global warming. By taking very thin cores from the tops of redwoods and studying their growth rings, the scientists hope to reconstruct the climate of the Pacific Northwest over past centuries.

The Stratosphere Giant stands in an undisclosed location. Botanists and park officials fear that if the public could find it the pressure of many human feet passing over the ground would compress the tree's root system, damaging its health. "I'd say the chances of finding a tree that's taller than the Stratosphere Giant are almost zero," Chris Atkins said one day in 2002. "But you never know."

On September 16th, Sillett, Antoine, Spickler, and I hiked into Hyperion Valley wearing backpacks full of tree-climbing gear. A number of other people came along, including Atkins and Taylor, three officials from the Save-the-Redwoods League, and the chief ranger of Redwood National Park, Pat Grediagin. Among national-park employees, the exact location of Hyperion was supposed to be known only to Grediagin, for the time being. "There's been a lot of talk about this discovery," Grediagin said. "I'm just worried that someone will get a wild idea to try to find this tree."

We hiked for a long time, passing stumps that were ten to fifteen feet across, and were bitten with chain-saw marks. Deeper in the forest, we waded upstream in a creek and crawled through salmonberry brambles and currant thickets. There were red-legged frogs in the creek—*Rana aurora*. Eventually, we came to a redwood-trunk pile, which choked the canyon and rose far above our heads. We wriggled through. "I call this 'grovelling' to get into the redwoods," Sillett said. Then we entered the Hyperion grove. Big laurel trees filled the understory, but they seemed like shrubbery beneath the redwoods. The branches of the laurels were draped with isothecium moss—a wispy rain-forest moss that hangs down in beards. We pushed through masses of sword ferns, and came to Hyperion. Its trunk is fifteen feet across near the base. Almost nothing of the tree was visible—nothing but a column of wood leading into the green undersurface of the redwood canopy, with a few breaks filled with sky.

Sillett took out a hunting crossbow from a backpack. It had a fishing reel attached to it, loaded with fishing line. He tied the line to a blunt-tipped arrow, and fired into Hyperion. After five or six shots, he got the fishing line over a branch that was about two hundred feet up the tree—a little more than halfway. Antoine tied a nylon cord to the fishing line, and Sillett reeled it in. Antoine tied one end of a climbing rope to this cord—it would be the main rope, which would provide access to the tree's crown. Sillett tied one end of the main rope to a small tree. He put on a helmet and a climbing harness, and ascended the other end of the rope into Hyperion, using rope-climbing devices called mechanical ascenders. Then he disappeared in the foliage. Along with his gear he carried a two-way radio.

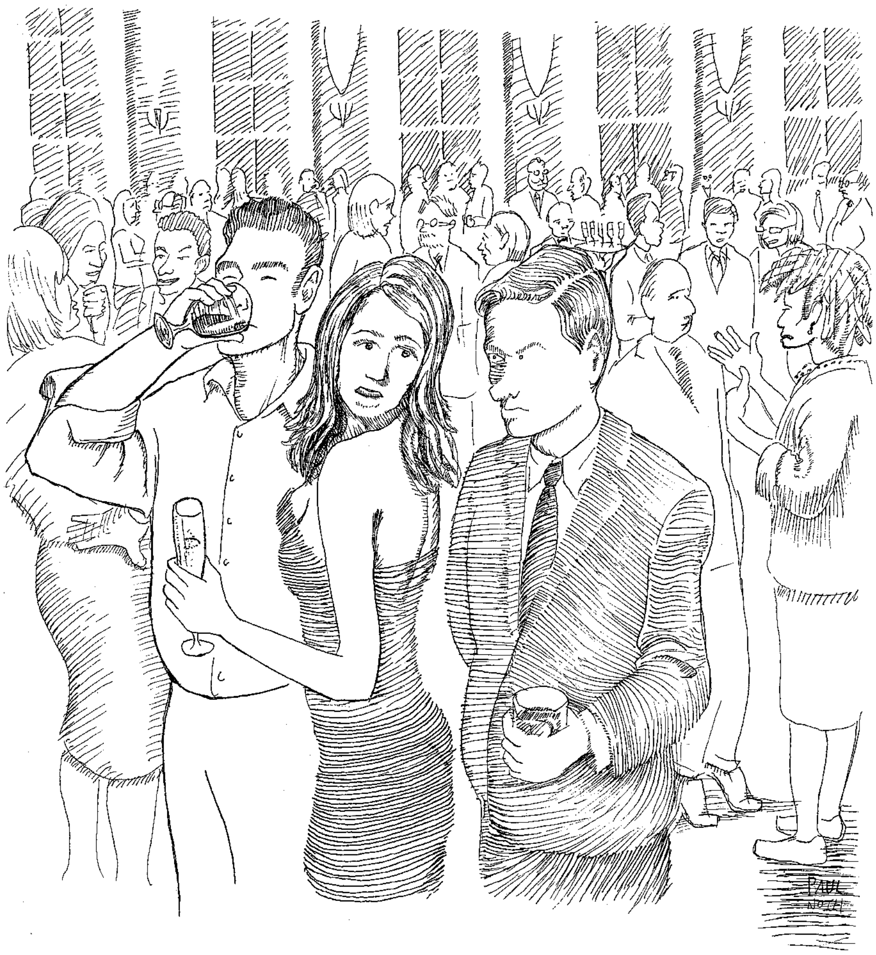
Once Sillett reached the top of the main rope, he left it behind and began using a special rig of ropes called a motion lanyard. Attaching alternate ends of the lanyard to branches over his head, he would haul himself up into the tree, moving steadily upward from branch to branch.

After an hour of lanyarding up Hyperion, Sillett called over the radio. "This tree just seems to go on forever," he said. "All the branches are downsloping."

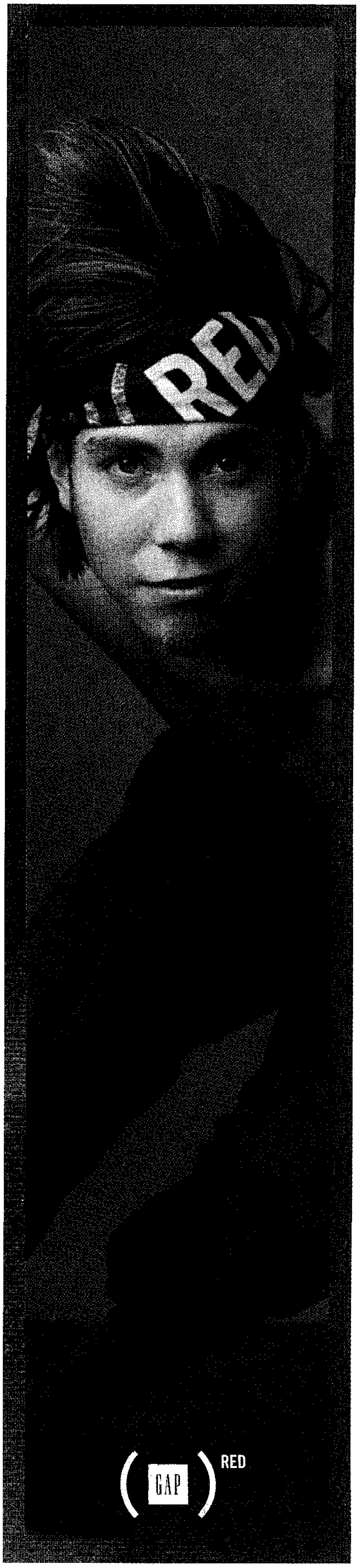
Antoine put on her gear, began climbing, and soon disappeared from view. After a while, she reported by radio that she, too, had moved off the main rope.

"I'm finding tiny golden-brown ants up here," Antoine said. "It's only the second time I've ever seen ants in a redwood."

"That may be a new species," Sillett



"No, I'm not trying to make you jealous. I really want to sleep with this guy."



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did you think you were doing? I mean . . .
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God will find the pattern and break it.

—*John Ashbery*

said. Often enough, when the scientists encounter something unusual living in a redwood, it proves to be an unknown species. In beds of soil sitting on limbs, they've found large pink earthworms, of a species that doesn't yet have a name.

Three hundred and thirty feet up, Sillett stopped, tied the middle of a rope to a branch, and let the ends drop down opposite sides of the trunk to the ground. Spickler and I got on each end and began to ascend. Every five metres, we stopped, kicked away from the tree, and swung, sometimes arcing twenty or thirty feet out into the air, while we pulled a measuring tape around the trunk. These measurements would allow the scientists to calculate the volume of the tree—the amount of wood it contained (eighteen thousand six hundred cubic feet, it turned out). Sixty metres above the ground—two hundred feet up—Hyperion is a little less than seven feet in diameter.

I continued to climb along a rope that Sillett had placed in the tree. The top of Hyperion speared into space; the creek was lost below in afternoon shadow. Other redwoods floated up, nearly as tall as Hyperion. I was looking at a place in the natural world which had never been seen before by human eyes. A wind had begun to blow, and the top of Hyperion swayed back and forth. The branches here were spindly, and were encrusted with many kinds of lichen. The trunk was ten inches wide at the place where I was hanging.

"This is a young tree," Sillett remarked. "It could be six hundred years old." That would make it about twenty years old in human time. There were reddish cracks in the bark at the base, which showed that the tree was still growing. "It could get to three hundred and ninety feet in our lifetime," Sillett said.

By two o'clock, Sillett had climbed within twenty feet of the top. He reported that it looked fragile: "There are a bunch of sapsucker holes, and there's a slight curve in the trunk." He stopped climbing. Then he raised an extendable metal pole until it touched the topmost branchlet of the tree, measured the length of the pole, and sent a tape line down. Hyperion was 379.1 feet tall. It was definitely the world's tallest tree.

After hearing that, Chris Atkins and Michael Taylor wandered off, carrying their laser range finders. In less than two months, the three tallest trees in the world had been discovered, hidden in semi-lost valleys. Atkins and Taylor were hoping to find the next one.

A few hundred feet from the base of Hyperion, the alder forest began: an enlarging clear-cut had almost reached Hyperion in the seventies. Nearby, we could see the marks of cat tracks—shelves on the steep slopes—choked with tiny young redwoods that had trunks no thicker than broom handles. "I think the tree was less than two weeks from being cut down," Sillett said. "One thing we can say for sure about Hyperion is that it is a very lucky tree." ♦

From an online poll conducted by AdAge.com.

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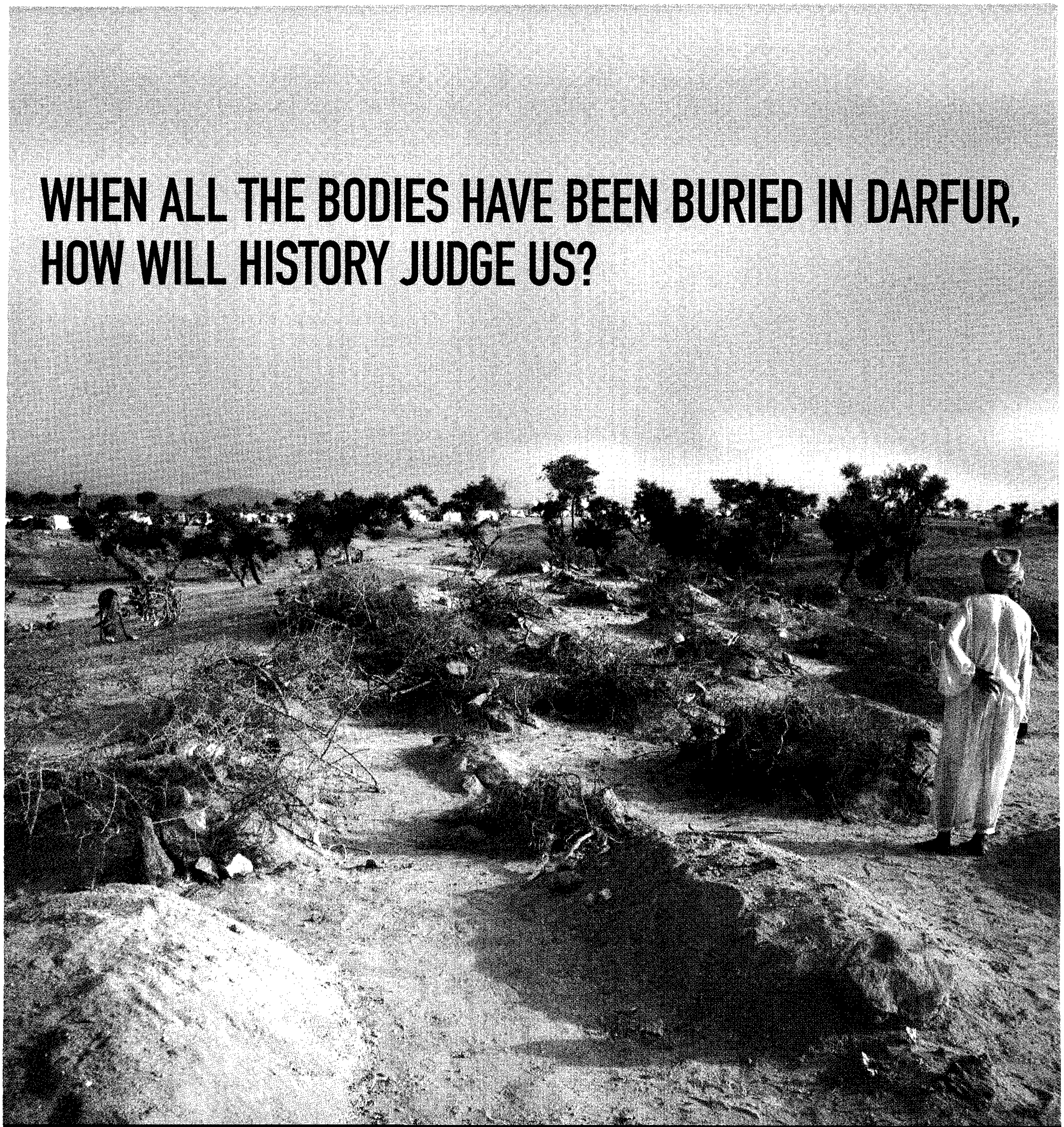
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CAN A T-SHIRT CHANGE THE WORLD?

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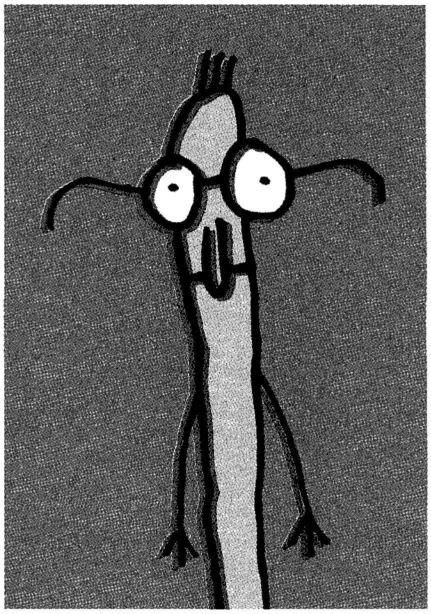
THIN ENOUGH

BY IAN FRAZIER

Like many middle-aged suburban fathers, I suffer from a problem I am hesitant to name. Recently, though, I've decided that stating what is wrong with me, and admitting it up front, are essential first steps to a cure. So here goes: For many years now, I have been struggling with anorexia. My physique, well muscled and whipcord thin to all outward appearances, is actually *too* thin—painfully thin, in fact. Another uncomfortable truth I have to face is that my family has been hiding this reality from me. My wife soft-soaps me with comments like "You know, sweetie, you're really not thin at all." The kids chime in with an unhelpful "Actually, we'd be more likely to describe you as fat." I know there's a lot of love in what they say, but let's stop all the lying right now. I am incredibly, incredibly thin, and it's time we noticed what is going on.

I myself participate in the deception sometimes, when I split a pair of trousers or have trouble fitting into an airplane seat. Who am I trying to fool? Much as I might wish it, that is simply not me. The truth is, I am a stick person. For I don't know how long, I have literally starved myself trying to attain a body image that bears no relation to how men actually are. The media hammers this image into our brains every day, but now I begin to understand: I can have the same glasses as Karl Rove, wear my belt like Karl Rove, wave from the insides of car windows like Karl Rove. But I will never *be* Karl Rove, so I might as well quit trying. Even Karl Rove probably can't look as fabulous as Karl Rove. I have martyred myself trying to become a fantasy.

Before I can hope to move on, I have to fix my crazy eating habits. During the height of my dieting mania, I used to torture myself regularly at the all-you-can-eat supper at Country Harvest Buffet. I would serve myself a platter of ribs, macaroni and cheese, potato salad, biscuits, peach cobbler, iced tea, no other dessert besides pie—and that would be all. Compared with the dishes of food still on the buffet table, my portion always appeared pitifully small, not enough to feed a fairly good-sized bird. And since I'm trying to be honest here and confess everything, sometimes after eating even that trifling amount I would go to the men's room and not throw up, but smoke an expensive cigar until the feeling passed, if it had existed in the first place. Then, ready for more, I'd return to the buffet. I gloried in this punitive regimen as the pounds melted off, but I did not suspect the pathology involved.



TIBOR KARPATI

So much to go through just for the evanescent pleasure of looking wonderful in a swimsuit! But conforming to others' physical expectations was not all to the good, I found. As I approached my ideal weight, I suffered the painful experience of being the victim of sexual harassment on the job. What made it even more confusing and upsetting was that I am my own boss. On several occasions around the office, I made remarks to myself that were completely out of line. Once by the water cooler I grabbed my buttocks. These hurtful words and actions created an atmosphere in which it was impossible for me to do my work. I have since taken a leave of absence.

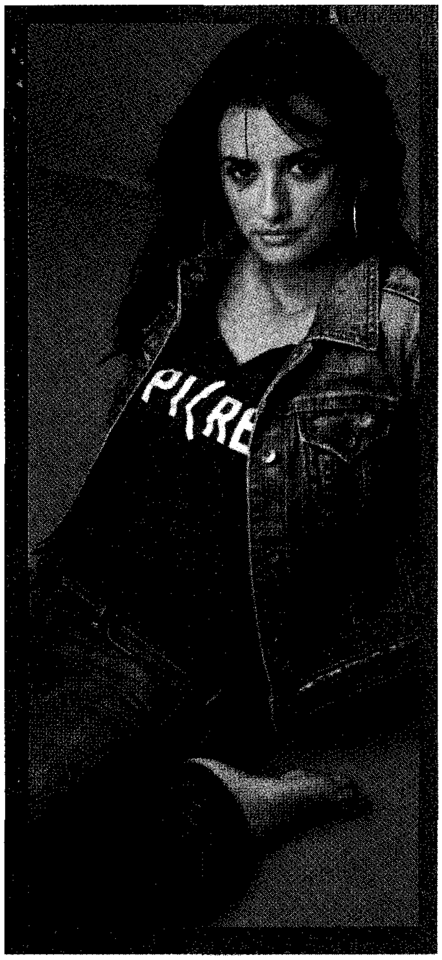
I see now that the anorexia contributed to this unfortunate situation in two ways—first, by giving me a physical appearance that was extremely "attractive," in the warped judgment of many (i.e., myself), and, second, by causing nutritional deprivations that broke down moral boundaries, leading me to behave inappropriately toward other individuals (again, myself). I am still undecided about taking legal action, but clearly a lot of soul-searching and emotional sorting out need to be done.

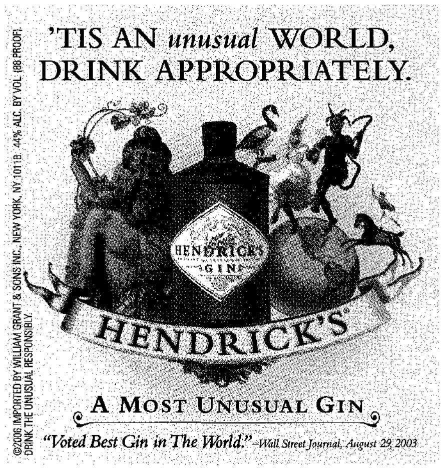
As much of a recovery as I've made so far I owe to an often overlooked wonder drug, alcohol. People drink alcohol for the pleasure and the taste, sometimes forgetting its medicinal properties. Scientists have failed to explain why consumption of alcohol causes an increase in appetite, but I can testify that it does. After four or five glasses of wine, I am able to overcome my usual food-finickiness and eat half a crock-pot of whatever my wife has made for dinner, and then a couple of baskets of leftover Easter candy. If I sense the appetite starting to flag, I'll open another bottle of wine, make a few phone calls to distant friends or people I went to high school with, start in on a pear tart my sister brought over, listen to music really loud, eat a bunch more Easter candy, fall asleep on the living-room floor, and so forth. Little by little, this careful process has been building the bulk back on.

But I can never relax. Anorexia is a patient and crafty adversary, always waiting for me to stop stuffing myself for the briefest interval so that it can gain another foothold. In the past few months, I've been feeling somewhat safe: I'm of average height, and have managed to attain for extra security a respectable weight of several hundred pounds. Then, just the other morning, I looked in the bathroom mirror and noticed that my head was a bit higher in relation to the towel rack than it had been the day before. Men in their fifties do not commonly go through growth spurts, but apparently that is happening to me. You don't have to be an alarmist to see where it could lead. I keep increasing in height, I reach seven or eight feet, and all my hard-won weight is stretched lengthwise until I'm a grotesque string-bean skeleton again.

Fortunately for me, Hilson's Products has come out with a new, more chocolaty version of their Death by Chocolate ice-cream bar, with chocolate on the outside, then vanilla around mint surrounding a rich real-chocolate core. Even when the mere thought of food makes me ill, I can eat a box of those. Another discovery I've made is the factory trawler ships' Weekly Seafood Specials, where they fly you offshore by helicopter and you choose your own netful of bunker or menhaden or whatever baitfish they're hauling up that day. Doesn't get any fresher than that! Also, I know some people at Archer Daniels Midland who give me access to the corn-syrup silos in Moline, where I can open the spigots and down as much as I feel like—none of this making it into McFlurrys or some such pap—just the real syrup, thick and undiluted and strong. You know what else is not bad? No. 2 heating oil. No. 6 oil is O.K., too, but you have to cut the sulfur content of both with a good Australian Shiraz, and that runs up the tab. Sulfur can also be a problem with bituminous coal, which is priced right but involves digestive issues that make it less of a bargain. Anthracite, on the other hand, can be lower in sulfur, but it's very hard on the teeth. Then finish it off with a jolt of pure power right from the grid; just—*zap!* If you like, I can give you the recipes.

I'm still too thin, though. I have robust mini-potbellies behind each elbow, and my forearms are good and stout, but the wrists are looking a little spindly. And I don't like the outside parts of my hands, the way they taper off. I can see the thinness there, waiting to strike. On my ankles, too; I've never been able to do anything with them. They could use another five or ten pounds apiece. I'll have to get the opposite of liposuction done to them. (Who in the world, by the way, would deliberately have perfectly good fat removed and then thrown down the drain?) By now, you're probably having some uncomplimentary thoughts about me. Well, I don't care even a fig for you. Wait a minute—let me see that fig. I just want to look at it. Gimme that. ♦

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LIFE AND LETTERS

WHAT IS A NOVELIST?

How great writers are made.

BY MILAN KUNDERA

TO UNDERSTAND, WE MUST COMPARE

When the great Austrian novelist Hermann Broch wanted to block out a character, he first seized on the character's essential position and then progressed to his more individual traits. From the abstract, he moved to the concrete. Esch is the protagonist of the second novel of Broch's trilogy "The Sleepwalkers" (1931-32). In essence, Broch says, he is a rebel. What is a rebel? The best way to understand the phenomenon, Broch goes on to say, is by comparison. Broch compares the rebel to the criminal. What is a criminal? A conservative, who relies on the present order and wants to join it, who considers his thefts and his frauds to be a professional activity that will make him a citizen like everyone else. The rebel, by contrast, fights the established order to bring it under his own domination. Esch is not a criminal. Esch is a rebel. A rebel like Martin Luther, Broch says. But why am I discussing Esch? It's the novelist who interests me! And to whom shall we compare the novelist?

THE POET AND THE NOVELIST

To whom shall we compare the novelist? To the lyric poet. The content of lyric poetry, Hegel says, is the poet himself; he gives voice to his inner world so as to stir in his audience the feelings, the states of mind he experiences. And even if the poet treats "objective" themes, external to his own life, "the great lyric poet will very quickly move away from them and end up drawing the portrait of himself" ("*stellt sich selber dar*").

Music and poetry, Hegel says, have an advantage over painting: lyricism. And in lyricism, he continues, music can go still further than poetry, for it is capable of grasping the most secret movements of the inner world, which are inaccessible to words. Thus there does exist an art—in this case, music—that is more lyrical than lyric poetry itself. From this we can deduce that the notion of lyricism is not limited to a branch of literature (lyric poetry) but, rather, designates a certain way of being, and that, from this standpoint, a lyric poet is only the most exemplary incarnation of man dazzled by his own soul and by the desire to make it heard.

I have long seen youth as the *lyrical age*—that is, the age when the individual, focussed almost exclusively on himself, is unable to see, to comprehend, to judge clearly the world around him. If we start with that hypothesis (necessarily schematic, but which, as a schema, I find accurate), then to pass from immaturity to maturity is to move beyond the lyrical attitude.

If I imagine the genesis of a novelist in the form of an exemplary tale, a "myth," that genesis looks to me like a *conversion story:* Saul becoming Paul; the novelist being born from the ruins of his lyrical world.

A CONVERSION STORY

From my bookshelf I take a copy of "Madame Bovary," the pocket edition from 1972. There are two prefaces, one by a writer, Henry de Montherlant, the other by a literary critic, Maurice Bardèche. These men saw nothing wrong with positioning themselves at a distance from the book in whose vestibule they are squatters. Says Montherlant, "Neither wit . . . nor freshness of idea . . . nor alacrity in the writing, nor unexpected soundings of the depths of the human heart, nor expressive discoveries, nor nobility, nor humor: Flaubert lacks genius to an astounding degree." No doubt, he goes on, one might learn something from Flaubert, but on the condition that one grants him no greater value than he's worth, and knows he is not "made of the same stuff as a Racine, a Saint-Simon, a Chateaubriand, a Michelet."

Bardèche seconds the verdict, and recounts the genesis of Flaubert the novelist: in September, 1849, he read to a couple of friends the manuscript of "The Temptation of St. Anthony," a "great romantic prose piece" (I'm still quoting Bardèche), into which "he put all his heart, all his ambitions," all his "grand thinking." The piece was roundly condemned, and his friends advised him to drop his "romantic flights," his "great lyrical transports." Flaubert obeyed, and two years later, at the end of 1851, he began writing "Madame Bovary." He did so "without pleasure," Bardèche says, as "a penance" that he "constantly curses and complains" about in his letters: "Bovary bores me, Bovary irritates me, the vulgarity of the subject gives me bouts of nausea," and so on.

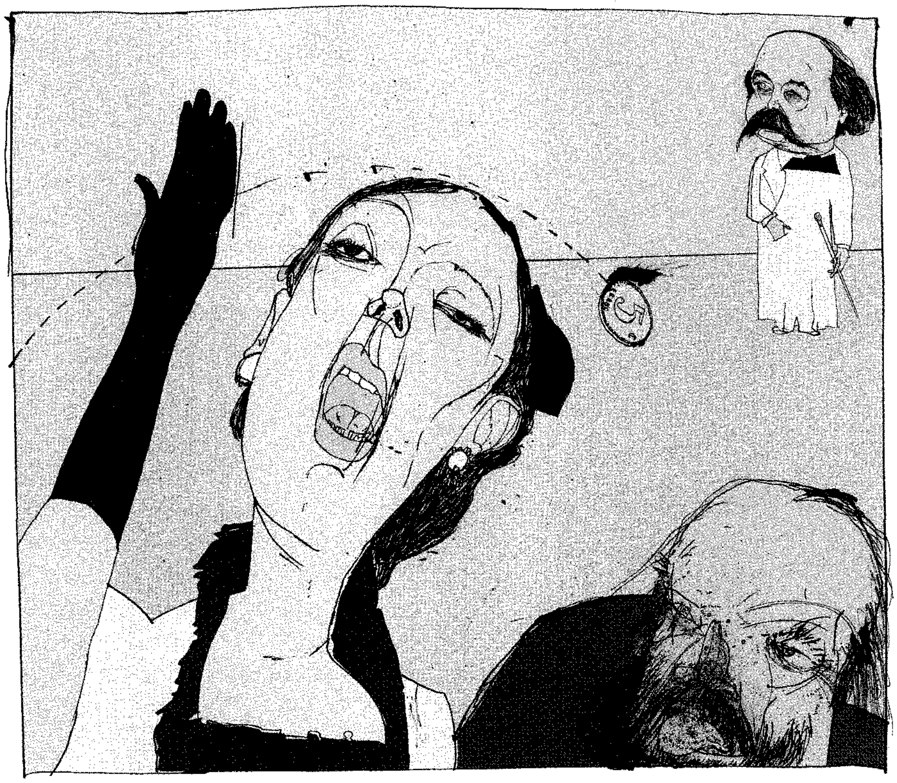
I find it hardly likely that, against his will, Flaubert would smother "all his heart, all his ambitions" merely to follow his friends' wishes. No, what Bardèche relates is not the story of a self-destruction. It is the story of a conversion. Flaubert is thirty years old, the appropriate age for tearing away his lyrical chrysalis. Complaining afterward that his characters are mediocre is the tribute he is paying to what has become his passion: the art of the novel and the territory it explores, the prose of life.

THE SOFT GLEAM OF THE COMICAL

After a society evening spent in the presence of his beloved Madame Arnoux, Frédéric, in Flaubert's "Sentimental Education," intoxicated with his future, goes home and stands at his mirror. I quote: "He thought himself handsome, and lingered a minute to gaze at his image."

"A minute." In that precise unit of time there is the whole enormity of the scene. He lingers, he gazes, finds himself handsome. For a whole minute. Without budging. He is in love, but he is not thinking about the woman he loves, so dazzled is he by his own self. He gazes at the mirror. But he does not see himself looking into the mirror (as Flaubert sees him). He is enclosed in his lyric self and is unaware that the soft gleam of the comical has settled over him and his love.

The anti-lyric conversion is a fundamental experience in the curriculum vitae of the novelist: separated from himself, he suddenly sees that self from a distance, astonished to find that he is not the person he thought he was. After that experience, he will know that nobody is the person he thinks he is, that this misapprehension is universal, elementary, and that it casts on people (for instance, on Frédéric, standing there at the mirror) the soft gleam of the comical. (That gleam of the comical, suddenly discovered, is the silent, precious reward for the novelist's conversion.)



Flaubert watches Madame Bovary watch herself, while giving alms to a beggar.

DAVID HUGHES

Toward the end of her story, Emma Bovary, after being turned away by her bankers and abandoned by Léon, climbs into a coach. At its open door a beggar "emitted a sort of muffled howl." She instantly "flung him a five-franc coin over her shoulder. It was her whole fortune. *She thought it quite fine, tossing the coin like that.*"

It really was her whole fortune. She was coming to the end. But the last sentence, which I put in italics, reveals what Flaubert saw very well but Emma was unaware of: she did not merely make a generous gesture; *she was pleased with herself* for making it—even in that moment of genuine despair, she did not miss the chance to display her gesture, innocently, wishing to look fine for her own sake. A gleam of tender irony will never leave her, even as she progresses toward the death that is already so near.

THE TORN CURTAIN

A magic curtain, woven of legends, hung before the world. Cervantes sent Don Quixote journeying and tore through the curtain. The world opened before the knight-errant in all the comical nakedness of its prose.

Like a woman who has applied makeup before hurrying to her first tryst, the world, when it rushes toward us at the moment of our birth, is already made-up, masked, *reinterpreted.* And the conformists won't be the only ones fooled; the rebel types, eager to stand up against everything and everyone, will not realize how obedient they themselves are; they will rebel only against what is interpreted (pre-interpreted) as worthy of rebellion.

Delacroix, for his famous painting "Liberty Leading the People," copied the setting from the curtain of pre-interpretation: a young woman on a barricade, her stern face, her naked breast inciting fear; at her side, an oaf with a pistol. Little as I care for this picture, it would be absurd to exclude it from what we call great painting.

But a novel that glorifies such con-

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ventional poses as these, such hackneyed symbols, does exclude itself from the history of the novel. For it is by tearing through the curtain of pre-interpretation that Cervantes set that new art going; his destructive act echoes and extends into every novel worthy of the name; it is *the identifying sign of the art of the novel.*

FAME

In "The Hugoliad," a 1935 pamphlet against Victor Hugo, the playwright Eugène Ionesco, who was twenty-six and still living in Romania, wrote, "The characteristic of the biography of famous men is that they wanted to be famous. The characteristic of the biography of all men is that they did not want to be, or they never thought of being, famous men. . . . A famous man is disgusting."

Let us try to sharpen the terminology: a man becomes famous when the number of people who know him is markedly greater than the number he knows. The recognition enjoyed by a great surgeon is not fame: he is admired not by a public but by his patients, by his colleagues. He lives in equilibrium. Fame is a disequilibrium. There are professions that drag it along behind them necessarily, unavoidably: politicians, supermodels, athletes, artists.

Artists' fame is the most monstrous of all, for it implies the idea of immortality. And that is a diabolical snare, because the grotesquely megalomaniac ambition to survive one's death is inseparably bound to the artist's probity. Every novel created with real passion aspires quite naturally to a lasting aesthetic value, meaning to a value capable of surviving its author. To write without having that ambition is cynicism: a mediocre plumber may be useful to people, but a mediocre novelist who consciously produces books that are ephemeral, commonplace, conventional—thus not useful, thus burdensome, thus noxious—is contemptible. This is the novelist's curse: his honesty is bound to the vile stake of his megalomania.

THEY KILLED MY ALBERTINE

Ten years older than I, Ivan Blatný (dead for years now) is the poet I most admired when I was fourteen. In one of his collections, a certain line kept recurring, with a woman's name in it: "*Albertinko, ty,*" which means "Albertine, you." It was an allusion to Proust's Albertine, of course. That name became for me, as an adolescent, the most captivating of all female names.

All I knew of Proust was the spines of the twenty or so volumes of "In Search of Lost Time" in Czech translation, lined up in a friend's bookcase. Because of Blatný, because of his "*Albertinko, ty,*" one day I plunged into them. When I got to the second volume, Proust's Albertine imperceptibly became entangled with my poet's Albertine.

Czech poets adored Proust's work but did not know his biography. Ivan Blatný did not know it. And it was actually fairly late when I myself lost the privilege of that lovely ignorance, when I heard it said that Albertine was inspired by a man, a man Proust was in love with.

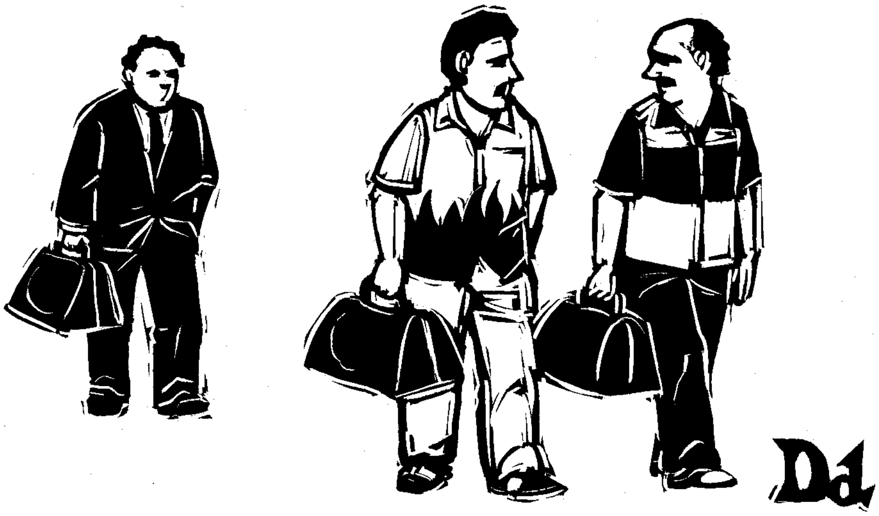
But what are they talking about! No matter who inspired her, man or woman, Albertine is Albertine, and that's that! A novel is the product of an alchemy that turns a woman into a man, a man into a woman, sludge into gold, an anecdote into drama! That divine alchemy is what makes for the power of every novelist, the secret, the splendor of his art!

But it was no use; I did my best to believe that Albertine was an utterly unforgettable woman, but, once I'd been told that her model was a man, that useless information was lodged in my head like a virus infecting a computer program. A male had slipped in between me and Albertine; he was scrambling her image, undermining her femininity. One minute I would see her with pretty breasts, the next with a flat chest, and every now and then a mustache would appear on the delicate skin of her face.

They killed my Albertine. And I recall Flaubert's words: "The artist must make posterity believe he never lived." Understand the meaning of that line: what the novelist seeks to protect above all is not himself; it is Albertine and Madame Arnoux.

MARCEL PROUST'S VERDICT

In "In Search of Lost Time," Proust is absolutely clear: "In this novel . . . there is not one incident that is not fictional . . . not one character à clef." However tightly bound to the life of its author,



"Stan thinks he's better than us now that he's a bowling consultant."

• •

Proust's novel stands, without question, at the opposite pole from autobiography: there is in it no autobiographical intention; he wrote it not in order to talk about his life but to show his readers their own lives. "Every reader, as he reads, is actually the reader of himself. The writer's work is only a kind of optical instrument he provides the reader so he can discern what he might never have seen in himself without this book. The reader's recognition in himself of what the book says is the proof of the book's truth." Those lines of Proust's define not only the meaning of the Proustian novel; they define the meaning of the very art of the novel.

THE ETHIC OF THE ESSENTIAL

Bardèche sums up his verdict on "Madame Bovary": "Flaubert missed his calling as a writer! And is that not basically the judgment of so many Flaubert admirers who end up telling you, 'Oh, but if you read his correspondence, what a masterwork, what an exciting man it reveals!' "

I, too, often reread Flaubert's letters, eager to know what he thought about his art and that of other writers. Still, fascinating as the correspondence can be, it is neither a masterwork nor a work. Because "the work," *l'œuvre*, is not simply everything a novelist writes—notebooks, diaries, articles. It is *the end result of long labor on an aesthetic project.*

I will go still further: "the work" is what the writer will approve in his own final assessment. For life is short, reading is long, and literature is in the process of killing itself off through an insane proliferation. Every novelist, starting with his own work, should eliminate whatever is secondary, lay out for himself and for everyone else *the ethic of the essential!*

But it is not only the writers, the hundreds and thousands of writers; there are also the researchers, the armies of researchers, who, guided by some opposite ethic, accumulate everything they can find to embrace the Whole, a supreme goal. The Whole, which includes a mountain of drafts, deleted paragraphs, chapters rejected by the author but published by researchers in what are called "critical editions," under the perfidious title "variants," which means, if words still have meaning, that anything the author wrote is worth as much as anything else, that it would be similarly approved by him.

The ethic of the essential has given way to *the ethic of the archive.* (The archive's ideal: the sweet equality that reigns in an enormous common grave.)

READING IS LONG, LIFE IS SHORT

I am chatting with a friend, a French writer; I urge him to read Witold Gombrowicz. When I run into him sometime later, he is uncomfortable: "I obeyed you, but, honestly, I couldn't under-

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stand your enthusiasm." "What did you read?" " 'Possessed.' " "Damn! Why 'Possessed'?"

"Possessed: The Secret of Myslotch" appeared in book form only after Gombrowicz's death. It is a popular novel that he published, as a young man, under a pseudonym, as a serial in a prewar Polish magazine. He never made it a book; he never intended to. Toward the end of his life, a long interview with Dominique de Roux was published in a volume called "A Kind of Testament." In it Gombrowicz discusses all of his work. *All of it.* One book after another. Not one word does he utter about "Possessed"!

I tell the fellow, "You've got to read 'Ferdydurke'! Or 'Pornografia'!"

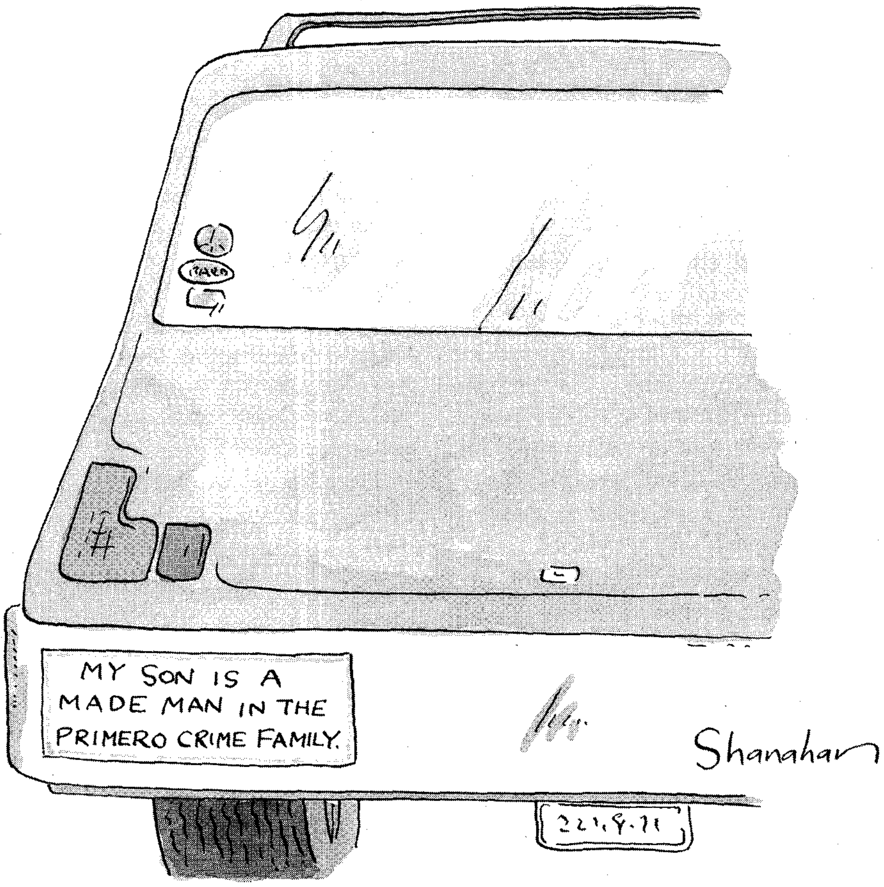
He looks at me sorrowfully. "My friend, the life ahead of me is growing short. The time I could spare your author is used up."

THE LITTLE BOY AND HIS GRANDMOTHER

Stravinsky definitively broke off his long friendship with the orchestra conductor Ernest Ansermet when the latter tried to make cuts in his ballet "Jeu de Cartes." Later, Stravinsky himself revisited his "Symphonies of Wind Instruments" and made a number of revisions. Hearing of this, Ansermet was indignant: he didn't like the revisions, and he disputed Stravinsky's right to change what he had originally written.

In the first instance as in the second, Stravinsky's reaction was equally apt: It's none of your business, my good fellow! Don't you go carrying on in my work the way you do in your bedroom! Because what an author creates doesn't belong to his papa, his mama, his nation, or to mankind; it belongs to no one but himself; he can publish it when he wants and if he wants; he can change it, revise it, lengthen it, shorten it, throw it in the toilet and flush it down without the slightest obligation to explain himself to anybody at all.

I was nineteen when, in my home town, a young academic gave a public lecture; it was during the first months of the Communist revolution, and, bowing to the spirit of the time, he talked about the social responsibility of art. After the conference, there was a discussion; what I remember is the poet



Josef Kainar (a man of Blatný's generation, also long dead now), who, in response to the scholar's talk, told this anecdote: A little boy takes his blind grandmother for a walk. They are strolling down a street, and from time to time the little boy says, "Grandma, watch out—a root!" Thinking she is on a forest trail, the old woman keeps jumping. Passersby scold the little boy: "Son, you're treating your grandmother so badly!" And the boy says, "She's my grandma! I'll treat her any way I want!" And Kainar finishes, "That's me, that's how I am about my poetry."

I'll never forget that demonstration of an author's rights proclaimed under the mistrustful gaze of the young revolution.

CERVANTES'S VERDICT

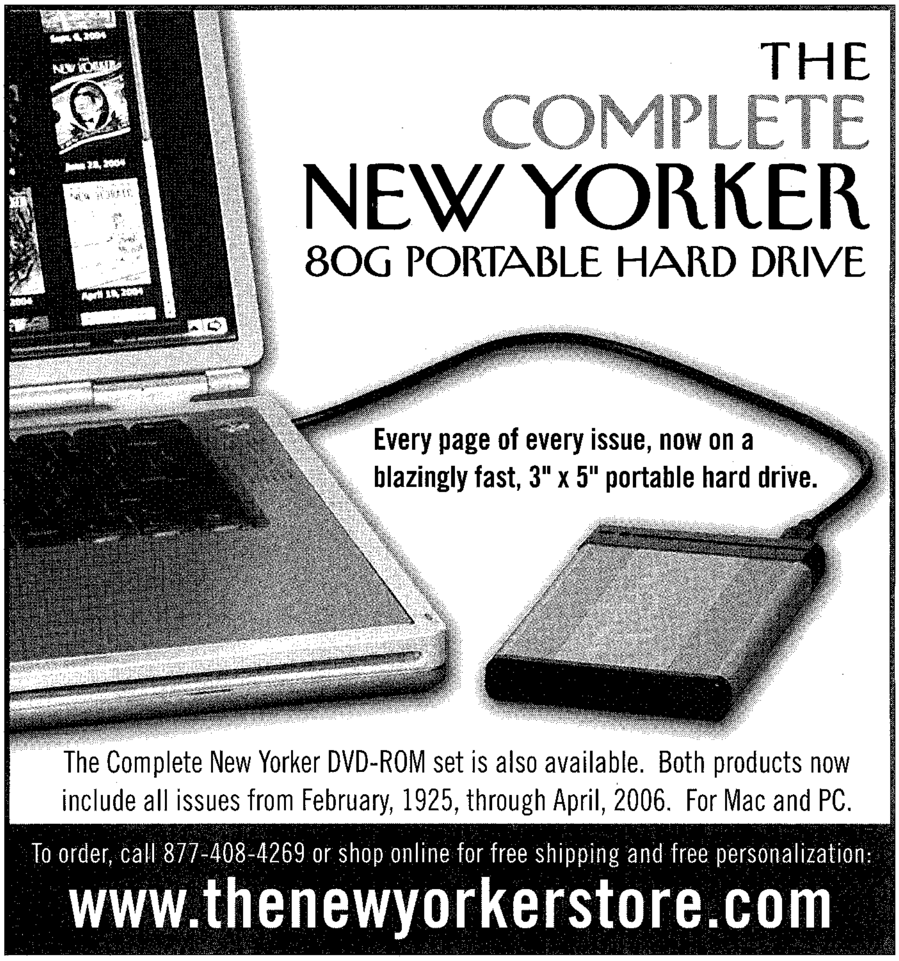
Several times in his novel, Cervantes sets out long lists of books on chivalry. He gives their titles but does not always feel it necessary to name the authors. At the time, respect for authors and their rights had not yet become customary.

Before Cervantes had completed the second volume of his novel, another writer, still unknown, preceded him by publishing, under a pseudonym, his own sequel to the adventures of Don Quixote. Cervantes reacted at the time the way a novelist would react today: with rage. He attacked the plagiarist violently and proudly proclaimed, "Don Quixote was born for me alone, and I for him. He knew about action, I about writing. He and I are simply one single entity."

Since Cervantes, this has been the primary, fundamental mark of a novel: it is a unique, inimitable creation, inseparable from the imagination of a single author. Before he was written, no one could have imagined a Don Quixote; he was the *unexpected* itself, and, without the charm of the unexpected, no great novel character (and no great novel) would ever be conceivable again.

The birth of the art of the novel was linked to the consciousness of an author's rights and to their fierce defense. The novelist is the sole master of his work; he *is* his work. It was not always thus, and it will not always be thus. But when that day comes, then the art of the novel, Cervantes's legacy, will cease to exist. ♦

(*Translated, from the French, by Linda Asher.*)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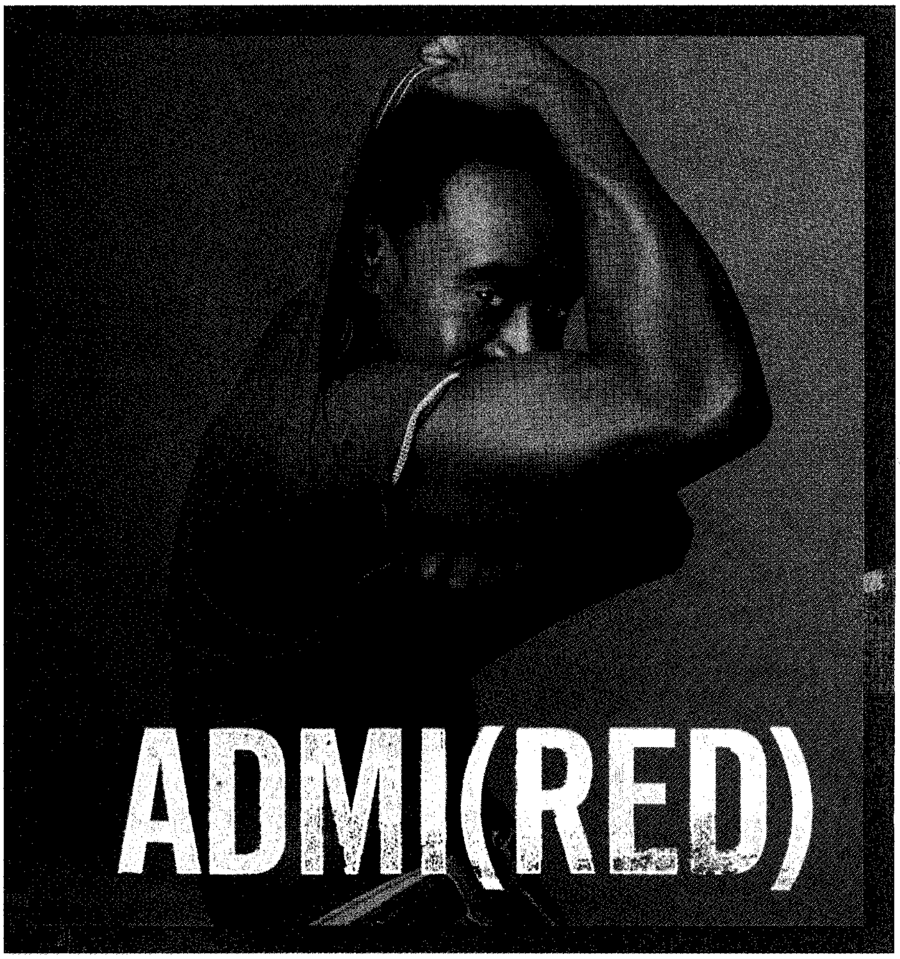


A REPORTER AT LARGE

ESCAPED

A killer who can't be kept in prison.

BY MARK SINGER

With a few noteworthy exceptions, people who meet Richard McNair tend to find him likable. He typically has an engaging and relaxed manner, chatty and unhurried; a former employer characterized him as having "an outgoing, lovable personality." When McNair was younger, women were drawn to him because he was good-looking: six feet tall, wiry and well groomed, with a playful smile. Now in his late forties, he remains trim and fit but has a curiously protean appearance. Sometimes he lets his hair grow long enough for a ponytail, and sometimes it's styled in a crewcut; sometimes it's blond or black instead of its natural brown. He might have a mustache and a goatee, a mustache but no goatee, a week's worth of stubble, or a clean shave. Most official documents list his eye color as blue, but it's also been identified as hazel. Last spring, in Louisiana, McNair removed his wire-rimmed glasses and told a police officer standing only a few feet away from him that his eyes were "green—well, kind of a turquoise-blue," and the officer didn't contradict him.

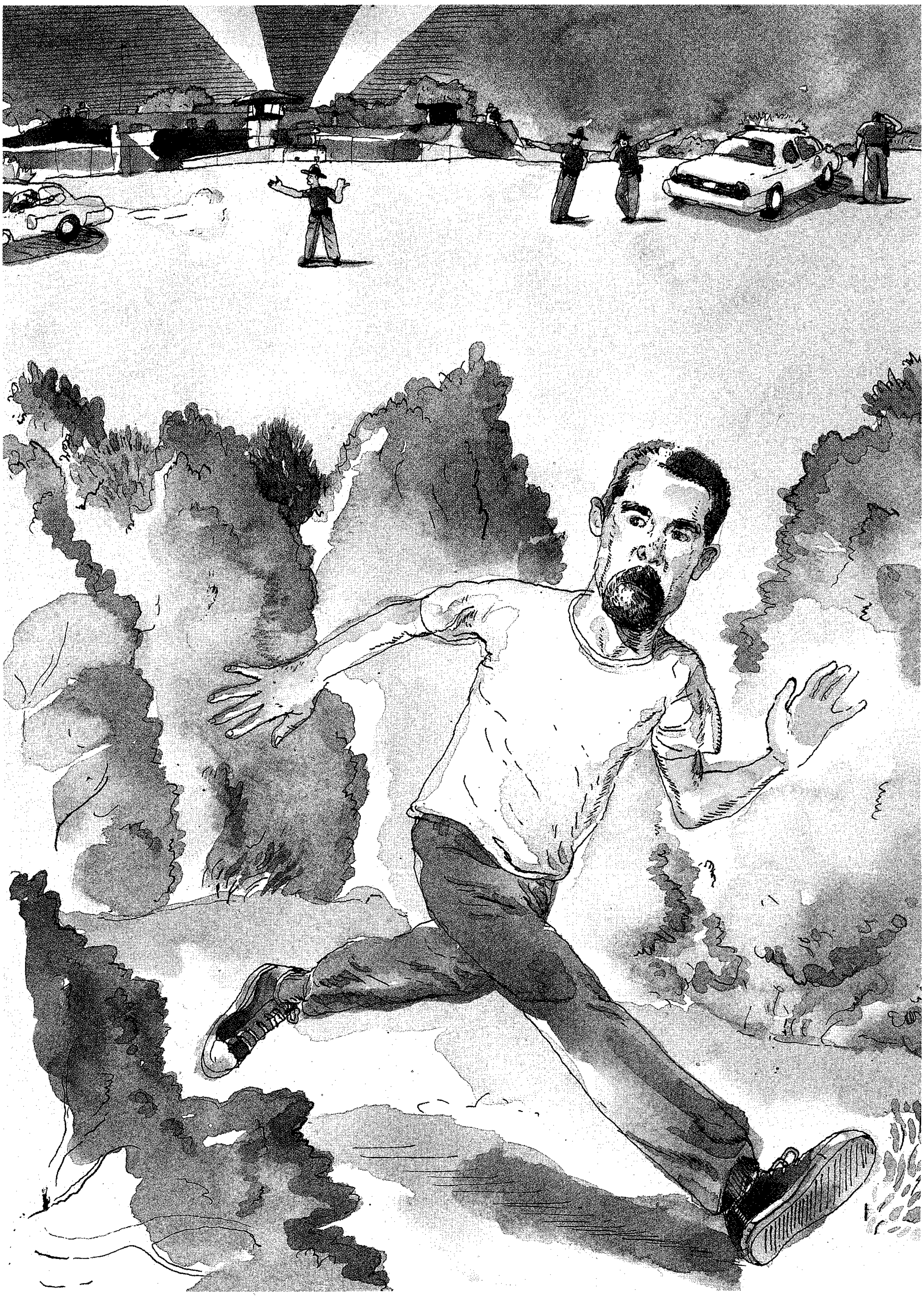
Acquaintances also remark upon McNair's intelligence and powers of observation. He has a casual alertness, a talent for sizing up people and his physical surroundings. His father, Jim, has said of him, "Anything he wants to do he would figure out," adding that any periodical his son read he digested cover to cover, and anything he read he remembered. Despite being both a quick study and a diligent long-term planner, however, McNair hasn't had a professional life to speak of, because for almost two decades he's been incarcerated in various state and federal prisons—that is, when he hasn't been on the lam. At the moment, he's thought to be somewhere in western Canada. If the United States Marshals who've been pursuing him since April have a more specific idea of his whereabouts, they haven't said so. His most recent unauthorized furlough, from the U.S. Penitentiary in Pollock, Louisiana, made him the first person in thirteen years to escape successfully from a maximum-security federal prison.

McNair is a convicted murderer. The bulletins in the wake of his most recent escape—his third—noted that he should be considered "extremely dangerous." His encounter with the police officer in Louisiana, however, which lasted about ten minutes and happened to be recorded by a video camera mounted on the dashboard of the officer's cruiser, hardly suggested this. Within two hours of receiving instructions to be on the lookout for a freshly escaped prisoner, the cop spotted a man jogging along a railroad track who turned out to be carrying no identification and who roughly matched a description of the fugitive. Yet, somehow, the men's conversation ended with the jogger saying, "You have a good day, now," and the cop replying, "Be careful, buddy," and sending him on his way. Only by wrestling the officer to the ground and seizing his weapon could McNair have demonstrated more literally what it means to be disarming. By the time his new friend had grasped whom he'd been talking to, McNair was miles away.

The taxonomy of penology includes various inmate archetypes, among them: the mind-their-own-business majority, who try to remain inconspicuous by complying with the rules; the incorrigibly violent, whose behavior inevitably causes them to be segregated from the main population; the predator and the preyed upon; the perpetually aggrieved and concomitantly litigious; the habitual scammer looking for ways to make his incarceration easier at the expense of other inmates; the snitch; and the pretend snitch, who trafficks in misinformation. Patrick Branson, a deputy warden at the North Dakota State Penitentiary, a maximum-security institution where McNair spent almost five years—and from which he escaped in 1992—told me, "The problem with McNair is he doesn't really fit any inmate mold. That's what makes him such a high risk. He is a con man, but he's very calculating, very patient. Most con men in prison are by definition not very successful or they wouldn't be here. McNair stands out because of his fixation on escaping. Knowing what I know about him, I can tell you this: If they catch him tomorrow, he's going to the nearest county jail or lockup. First they're going to put him in restraints, then put him in a police car, then take him to a processing area. From the time you start step No. 1, his mind is thinking, How do I get out of these cuffs or this car? What's the weak spot in this facility? When he goes to a new facility, from the moment he arrives, he's thinking about escaping."

Around nine-thirty on a November night in 1987, on the outskirts of Minot, North Dakota, Richard Kitzman, an employee of the Farmers Union grain elevator, returned to the elevator to meet a truck driver named Jerome Theis. Minot, the seat of Ward County, is in the central part of the state, a hundred or so miles north of Bismarck, the capital. Kitzman was in his early thirties, had worked for the Farmers Union for more than a decade, and lived with his wife and two children in a mobile-home court across the street, which was convenient because trucks often had to be loaded at odd hours. Theis, himself a father of three and stepfather of five, lived outside Minneapolis, five hundred miles to the southeast. He'd called Kitzman from a pay phone and told him that he was ready to fill up—with whatever, flax or wheat or durum—for transport to a grain processor near the Twin Cities. He parked his tractor-trailer rig on the entrance ramp to a loading bay. From inside its cab, where he was fortifying him-

BARRY BLITT



For almost two decades, Richard McNair has been incarcerated in state and federal prisons—when he hasn't been on the lam.

self with a carton of vanilla ice cream and a Pepsi, he wouldn't have seen Kitzman entering the elevator business office, around the corner.

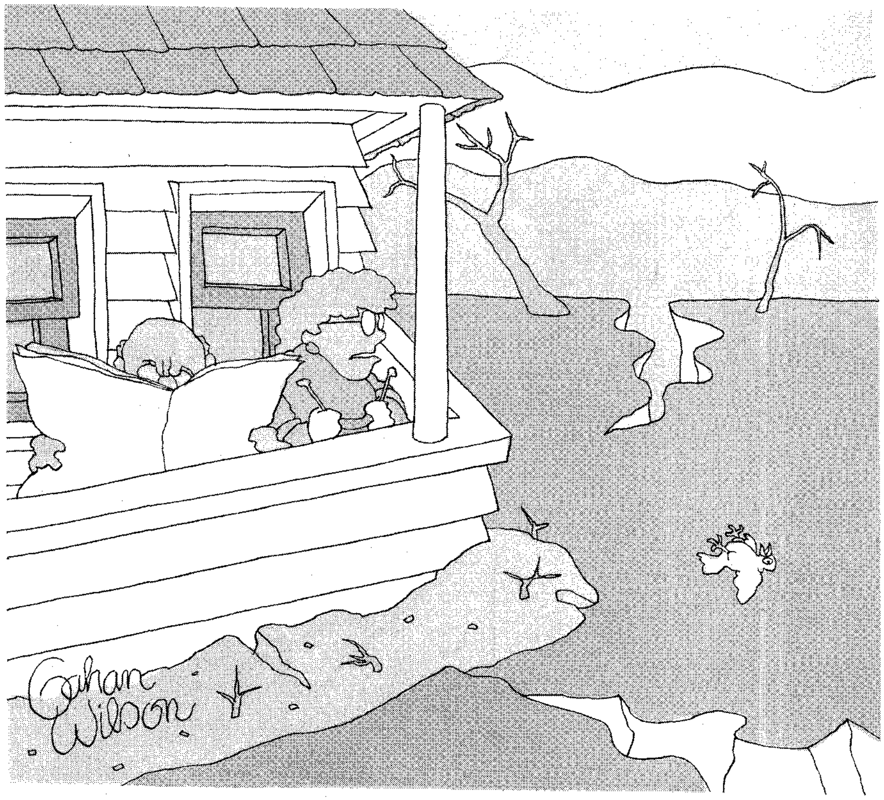
Nor had he laid eyes on McNair, who had trespassed an hour or so earlier and got busy rifling desks and trying to pry open a small safe. This was an avocation that McNair had pursued that fall in and around Minot—burglarizing businesses that lacked security alarms, thus allowing him ample time to grab whatever seemed valuable, which, over all, hadn't amounted to much: a few hundred dollars (including change from vending machines), tools, postage stamps, a videocassette recorder, rolls of tape and tape dispensers, doorknob assemblies. Invariably, he left drawers and doors open, and he often left behind footprints of wavy-patterned soles.

Kitzman unlocked the front door, noticed that a retractable gate separating the office clerks' desks from the grain-handling operation was raised, didn't think much of it, stepped through a pair of glass doors into an area called the shaker room, turned on the lights, and was confronted with the aftermath of a ransacking.

McNair came out of the back room where he'd hidden upon hearing Theis's truck arrive. Though his burglary had been interrupted, he still could have walked out the front door unnoticed. Instead, he focussed upon Kitzman, who stood with his back to the shaker-room doors, aimed a .38-calibre handgun at his head, and fired through the glass. Kitzman hit the floor, grazed and bleeding. There's no evidence that McNair had killed before, but he proceeded without hesitation into the shaker room to finish the job.

Kitzman lay on the floor. Looking up, he saw a gunman who had assumed a two-handed firing posture. He screamed and rolled into a fetal crouch as McNair began emptying his five-shot revolver, point blank. One bullet hit Kitzman in the wrist, another passed through both of his legs, and the last two—the kick from the gun must have thrown off McNair's aim—pierced a couple of wooden drawers. Retreating to the rear office, McNair reloaded his gun, slipped the five spent shells into his pocket, placed in a small duffel whatever he still felt like stealing, and went back through the shaker room, retracing the path of his break-in. Later, it emerged that McNair suffered from a chronic nervous stomach and had been in the bathroom when Theis and Kitzman surprised him. He hadn't flushed then and he didn't now. In his haste, he also failed to register that Kitzman was still alive.

Lying on the floor, playing dead, Kitzman got a good look at McNair's shoes. He waited a couple of minutes ("till I guessed he wasn't coming back"), then crawled into a foreman's office and dialled 911. The recording of his conversation with the dispatcher captured five more gunshots. McNair initially assumed that the person he'd shot inside the shaker room was the driver of the truck, but he realized otherwise when, outside, he saw the rig's running lights switch off. He crept around the cab and stepped up on the running board. If Theis experienced the same terror that Kitzman had, it didn't last long. McNair shot him between the eyes; a coroner later determined that at least two other wounds would also have been fatal. Police cars and an ambulance arrived within a few minutes, but McNair had disappeared.



"It's a pity those awful people were right about the environment."

The murder of Jerome Theis was one of only two homicides in Ward County in 1987 and one of only eleven that year in North Dakota. The authorities pursued their investigation in a thorough and methodical manner. A drawing based upon Kitzman's description of the suspect was circulated, and an eighteen-thousand-dollar reward was announced. For a long while, the investigators made little progress; then they got lucky. McNair, who was born and raised in southern Oklahoma, had been living in North Dakota because he was a sergeant in the U.S. Air Force, stationed at a base in Minot. In February, three months after the murder, he had carelessly fallen behind on his rent to a local storage facility where, under an assumed name, he stashed many of his stolen goods. Less than a week before he would have completed his tour of duty, a manager at the facility had removed the lock from his unit and decided that the cache of merchandise looked suspicious: a sealed box of computer equipment had a label bearing an address at the Minot Air Force Base, and several rolls of carpeting had price tags from a Minot store still attached. She contacted the police and the airbase's security force, who, along with Ward

County sheriff's detectives, established that McNair—who was making plans to leave town—was the storage-facility customer and that he matched Kitzman's description of the killer.

McNair had apparently not been too worried about being pinpointed. After his arrest, an Air Force captain who had worked with him came forward and told how he had joked, "The drawing looks like me, so you should turn me in and we can split the reward money." Whatever frisson that gave McNair was probably exceeded by the thrill of his occasional visits to the Minot Police Department. About a year before he began moonlighting as a burglar, he'd volunteered as a confidential informant who could set up buy-and-bust drug arrests.

"If I had somebody I was interested in, I'd call him," Clint Wolf, who was then a Minot P.D. narcotics detective, told me. "Or if he had someone he'd call me. He had the gift of gab. He knew how to make friends, how to work 'em."

Another detective, Mike Knoop, added, "McNair worked out really well. Had he not committed crimes, he probably would have been an excellent investigator someplace."

Wolf wasn't always impressed by McNair's judgment; he had to stop him from carrying a gun during drug buys, for instance. But, on balance, Wolf said, "he seemed like a pretty good guy. He wasn't a shithead, like a lot of snitches."

Later, Wolf and Knoop and other Minot cops recalled how McNair had asked offhand questions about the progress of the investigations of his crimes. While plotting burglaries, he'd taken into account where the city line was and where patrol surveillance might be spotty. He also carried a portable police scanner with him.

"McNair would steal your car and sell it back to you, and you'd think you've got a hell of a deal," Knoop said. "Those kind of people will play a game with you—trying to outwit law enforcement. He's very intelligent. For him, it's one of those catch-me-if-you-can situations. And we did."

Catch-me-if-you-can-and-then-catch-me-again is more like it.

The day after the search of the storage locker, McNair went to the Minot police station because Don Schneider, the chief of detectives, had summoned him under the pretext of discussing his work as an informant. Once the conversation got under way in Schneider's office, however, McNair knew he was in trouble. Schneider and another detective, Boyde Galgerud, described searching the locker and finding the stolen goods.

"I think I need an attorney," McNair said.

"If you think you need one, you need one," Galgerud replied. Schneider handed him a phone directory.

"And I need to go to the bathroom," McNair said.

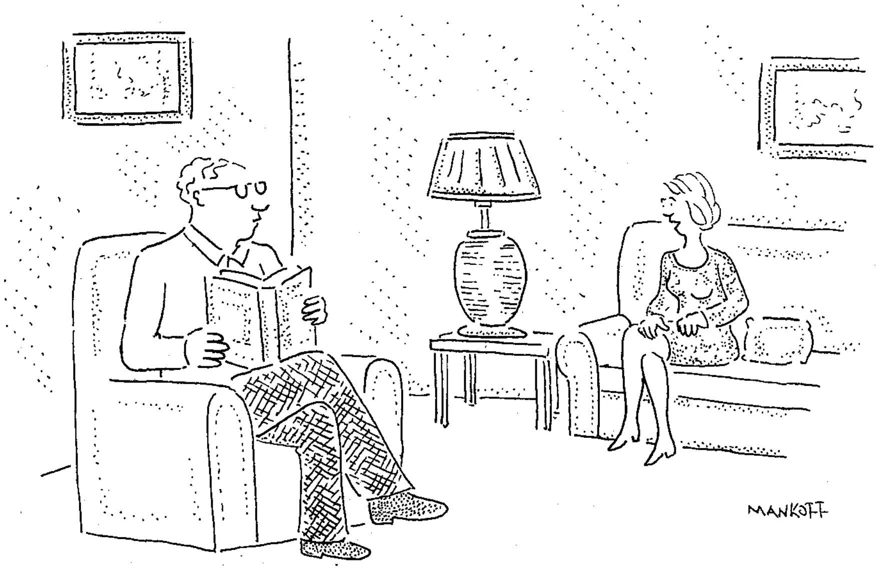
Before he could relieve himself, Galgerud frisked him and came up with a .380 hidden in his underwear. So they had one more reason to place him in custody. Now what? The murder case was officially within the jurisdiction of the Ward County sheriff; tactical choices had to be made, the state's attorney had to be consulted, and it was time for lunch. Schneider and Galgerud headed for a restaurant a few miles away, where they were joined by the state's attorney and other officials.

Before food was delivered to the table, word arrived that McNair had escaped. Back at the station, he'd been handcuffed to a chair and left in the care of Knoop and two other detectives. As the lunch group dashed to their cars, Schneider said of McNair, "He'd better be carrying a chair."

He wasn't. While the attention of Knoop and his colleagues was somehow elsewhere, McNair had reached into his pocket for a tube of lip balm, greased the inside of his handcuff, and slipped out. When he bolted, he slammed a door on the hand of one of the detectives. Knoop was recovering from knee surgery and, when he got outside, jammed his leg on the ice. The third detective stepped the wrong way on a curb and fractured his heel. "So it was like Moe, Larry, and Curly trying to chase this guy," Knoop recalled. "Pretty entertaining, if you want to look at it that way." McNair went through the station parking lot, up a steep stairway built into an embankment, past a couple of municipal buildings, and within five blocks found a parked car with the keys in the ignition. He drove three blocks, the car stalled, he jumped out and started running again. About an hour later, a reporter for the Minot *Daily News* alerted the police that he had spotted McNair entering a small apartment building near the county courthouse. When McNair climbed out of a third-floor window, he had an audience of half a dozen law-enforcement officers, including Knoop, whom he later told, "Nothing against you, Mike, but yours was the last face I wanted to see up there." He jumped for a tree limb, fell to the ground, and was back in custody.

The evidence against McNair—items removed from the murder scene that turned up in a search of his home; spent shells from the murder weapon that turned up in the storage locker; footwear that matched the prints left at the scene of the murder and at the scenes of several burglaries; Kitzman's identification of him in a photo lineup; the evidence from the grain-elevator toilet—obviated a trial. With his plea bargain pending, McNair started trying to dig his way out of the Ward County jail. He had freed two cinder blocks from inside his cell and stored a flashlight and some tied-together sheets and towels in the crawlspace by the time his handiwork was uncovered. On another occasion, as he was being transferred in handcuffs from a state hospital back to the county jail, he was found to be carrying a tube of lip balm; according to an incident report, he "smiled when it was discovered." Upon pleading guilty, he received two life sentences—one for murder and one for attempted murder—plus thirty years on the burglary charges, in the North Dakota State Penitentiary, in Bismarck, where he matriculated in July, 1988.

As maximum-security penal facilities go, the North Dakota State Penitentiary doesn't emanate an especially forbidding aura. To enter the main administration building, a single-story orange brick structure that's the portal to the cellblocks, you pass through a remote-controlled gate in an eighteen-foot chain-link fence crowned with razor wire. On my first visit, a jackrabbit that had sidestepped ground-level coils of razor wire was inside the fence, nibbling impatiens in a flower bed. Outside, less than a hundred feet away, is a Victorian mansion where the warden resides. The first prisoners arrived in 1885, during territorial days, and the most recently completed



"Oh, nothing. I was just hoping that our affair would be more sordid."

• •

cellblock opened in 1987. The cellblocks flank a yard large enough to accommodate a jogging track, a vegetable garden, a sweat lodge, athletic fields, and, until a decade ago, an annual rodeo. The maximum-security complex is adjacent to a medium-security treatment center for chemical addictions, and its north windows face a dairy farm that stopped operating long ago, for budgetary reasons. A still viable enterprise, Rough Rider Industries, employs inmates to manufacture office furniture, Dumpsters, work uniforms, sheets, towels, and (it's a prison, after all) license plates. The windows of the Rough Rider building and of the cellblocks are barred, of course, and until the early nineties the exterior walls constituted the perimeter of the institution. The provenance of various retrofittings since then—the chain-link and razor-wire fence, sensors that trigger an alarm when the fence is shaken, infrared motion detectors that do the same—can be traced, more or less directly, to McNair's exploits as an inmate. The only thing missing is a commemorative plaque.

The particulars of McNair's crimes and punishment mandated that he serve at least twenty years before he'd qualify for parole. When he entered prison, his file included a memorandum from the Ward County Sheriff's Department to the effect that he was "highly manipulative, persuasive and personable," with a "talent for gaining people's confidence by talking smooth." Another referred to him as a "very high escape risk." Whether or not he was aware of these appraisals or familiar with one of the cardinal protocols of prison management—that corrections employees should never befriend convicts or share details of their personal lives—he quickly set out to ingratiate himself with the prison staff. He was determined to establish a reputation as a model inmate, not as a goal in itself but as a means to an end (which, if attained, would render him anything but a model inmate). His first job was in the laundry room but his sights were on the Rough Rider Industries building. Exemplary behavior could make that possible, and before too long he had a job there.

He was instrumental in starting a monthly newspaper, *The Inside Times*, and regularly contributed articles. During the murder investigation, detectives had found among his belongings fragments of short stories—inchoate scenes of mostly cops-and-robbers stuff that suggested literary ambitions but no real aptitude. McNair's writing for *The Inside Times* was comparably pedestrian, but it served one important purpose: it provided a cover for him to scrutinize various corners of the penitentiary that he otherwise wouldn't have been able to explore. Over several months, he conducted interviews with the production supervisors at Rough Rider Industries—in the upholstery shop, the sign shop, the metal shop, the license-plate factory—and he wrote about the substance-abuse-treatment and crisis-intervention-program personnel. His prose had the toadying blandness of a heavily vetted high-school newspaper. From an item headlined "FEMALE OFFICERS IN THE CORRECTIONAL ENVIRONMENT": "If being an officer is a difficult job, can you imagine the difficulty of a Female Officer in a mainly male prison? I tried to base my interview on that concept, but as I visited with each individual I found every officer to have so many fresh ideas and motivations. The article became more of a way for them to share their ideas and show that they are as human as the next person."

McNair's actual curiosity about the lives of his interview subjects was, most likely, next to nil. He wanted to know whether, in whatever niche of the institution they inhabited, any permeable seams in the security system existed. The employee assigned to supervise *The Inside Times* happened to be the executive assistant to the then warden, Thomas Powers. In October, 1989, when McNair had been in the penitentiary for fifteen months, Powers wrote a letter commending him and two other inmates for their "professionalism" and "dedication" to their work on the paper. The following year, McNair petitioned for a reclassification of his sentence. After that was denied, and after his appeal was denied, he wrote directly to Powers, who reaffirmed the decision but wrote, encouragingly, "Without a doubt you are doing a super job here. I have been impressed with both your maturity and attitude. . . . Reputations are easy to make and hard to break. You made one in Ward County, and are on the way to breaking it here." McNair reciprocated a few weeks later with a "quick note to thank you for the time you took out for my family"—a reference to his parents and whichever of his three brothers had come from Oklahoma to visit him—"and the chance to show them our facilities." (Did Warden Powers ask himself from which prison-etiquette handbook McNair had gleaned lines such as "It really put them at ease to see their son is in such a caring and progressive environment"?)

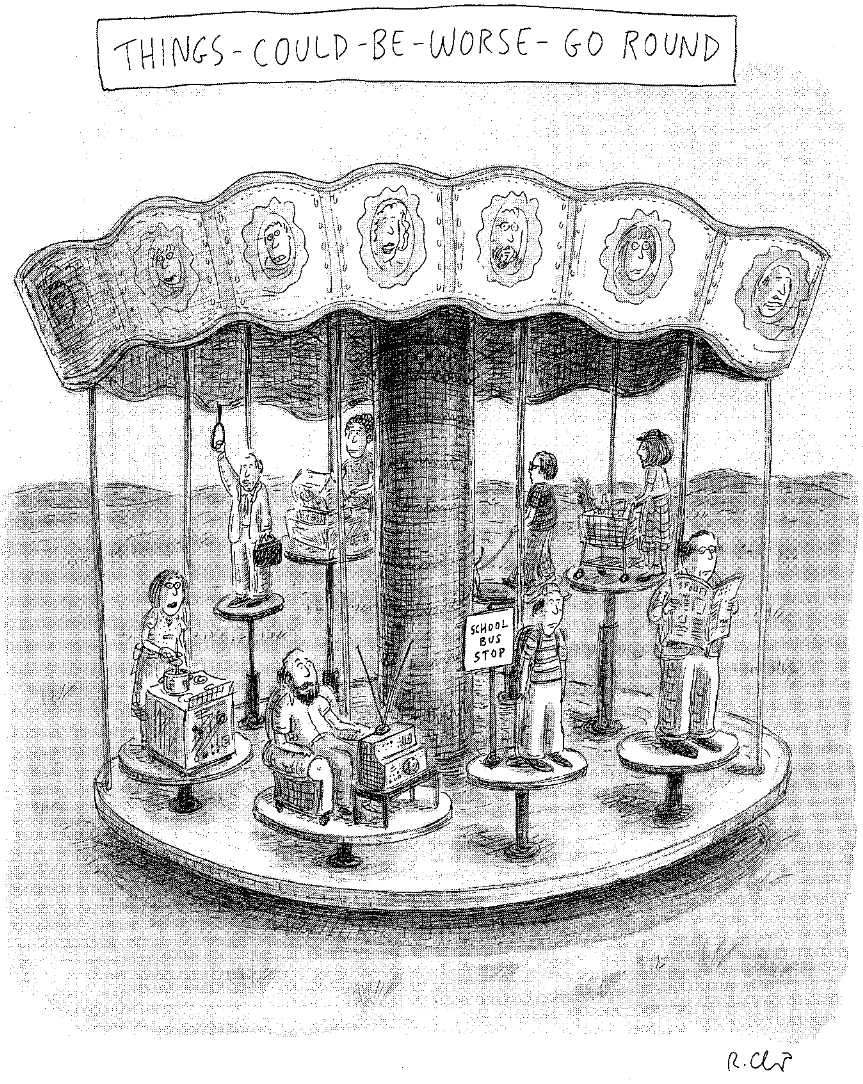
The guided tour for McNair's family presumably omitted the administrative segregation (A.S.) unit of the west cell house—the destination for a prisoner who, say, is discovered to have misappropriated a cutting torch in the metal shop of the Rough Riders Industries building and has managed to remove all but two of the security bars from an air vent that he's planning imminently to escape through, along with two other inmates. In April, 1991, when McNair was a day away from learning whether such a scheme would succeed, one of his confederates—troubled by the news that the driver of the group's getaway car would be showing up with loaded weapons, just in case—tipped off the prison staff.

For McNair, the consequence was a year of round-the-clock isolation (except for five hours in a recreation yard and five twenty-minute showers each week); meal trays shoved through a slot; no work assignment other than janitorial tasks on the A.S. tier. Early on, he wrote notes of apology to Warden Powers and his executive assistant and offered to have twenty dollars a month deducted from his spending account to pay for the damage he'd caused with the torch. If he imagined that contrition might lead to amnesty, he was disappointed. By the time he was allowed to return to the general population, in the spring of 1992, Powers had departed, and *The Inside Times* had suspended publication, which meant that McNair wouldn't be in a position to spend a lot of face time with the new warden, Tim Schuetzle, who, in any event, was immune to his schmoozing skills. Still, the thwarted escape represented an opportunity to learn from his mistakes and refine his methodology. He was soon ready to try again.

The window nearest McNair's cell in the isolation wing had offered a less than scenic view—a sliver of sky but mainly the roof of the adjacent education building, whose classrooms were a venue for college-level courses, Bible-study groups, Native American culture groups, and gatherings affiliated with outside organizations like the Jaycees. He would have focussed most intently upon the education building's only promising fixture: a rectangular vent on the west wall.

In the early evening of October 9, 1992, McNair went to watch a film—well, not actually—in one of the classrooms with two other inmates, William Holland, a murderer doing a life sentence, and Rondal Heitsch, whose original fifteen-year term for attempted murder (with a ball-peen hammer) had been extended by three years after he'd participated in McNair's foiled escape the year before. (It was Heitsch's unfortunate girlfriend who'd agreed to drive the getaway car.) The room had windows with blinds that could be drawn when movies were shown. That night's screening was "The Ten Commandments." Perfect, McNair must have calculated: everyone in the joint either had watched it several times or had no desire to see it in the first place. Naturally, when questions were later asked, not a single convict acknowledged having been present. (Guards were patrolling the hallway, but not the room itself.) So, officially, no one witnessed McNair, Holland, and Heitsch as they removed a pair of acoustic tiles from the ceiling and broke through a vent. They subsequently crawled through ductwork, kicked out a security grate, and emerged from the vent on the side of the education building. No guard tower existed on that side of the prison, nor was it likely that a sentry in the east tower would spot them, because at that hour he would have been looking directly into the setting sun. The prisoners shimmied up a fencepost and dropped fifteen feet to the roof of the visitors' room. Another fifteen-foot leap, a soft landing on a patch of lawn, no chain-link fence or razor-wire impediments, and they were off.

A captain, alerted by a guard inside the visitors' room, looked out the front door of the administration building in time to see three men in a hurry, heading south, toward the Burlington Northern railroad tracks. Heitsch had twisted an ankle and was lagging behind. As McNair sprinted away, never looking back, it dawned on Heitsch that they were in this together only up to a



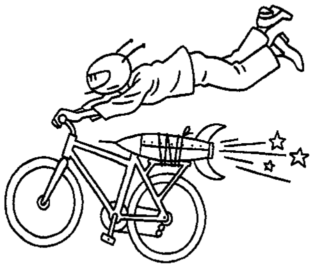
point. Holland was captured within three hours, Heitsch within two days. The searchers surmised that McNair had hopped a freight train, but in fact he left Bismarck by burglarizing a plumbing supplier and stealing a truck, which was later found in Arizona.

He stayed at large and on the move for nine months. He mailed notes to staff members at the prison. The messages weren't explicitly taunting but had that effect anyway. Because he omitted a return address, no one wrote back to mention that a hacksaw blade had been found inside the laptop computer he'd left behind and another beneath the insole of one of his tennis shoes. At liberty, McNair enjoyed posing as a journalist (though not, one assumes, as a staff member, active or erstwhile, of *The Inside Times*). In West Virginia, where he insinuated himself into a group of guys who had gone to college together and were having an informal reunion, he explained that he'd come to the state on a magazine assignment to write about rural poverty. The magazine, he told them, was *The New Yorker*.

On July 5, 1993, he drove a Chevrolet van that had been stolen in Minnesota to the parking lot behind a car dealership in Grand Island, Nebraska. He broke a door lock to get inside the showroom, which was closed for the July 4th holiday weekend. He might have been planning to trade the van for a different vehicle, but he didn't get that far. A manager of the dealership and his wife, who were passing by, told a police officer who was serendipitously cruising through the lot on a routine patrol that they'd spied an intruder. Cornered, McNair expended his best effort, as ever. He came out of the dealership, pointed west, shouted "He went *that* way!" and started running east. It was too cursory an encounter to charm the cop, who began a foot chase while radioing for backup. McNair zigged and zagged for several minutes, twice crossing a state highway, before he was apprehended. In his pockets were a handheld police scanner and an electric stun gun.

After spending three weeks in a Nebraska jail, McNair was extradited to North Dakota, where he became reacquainted with the mind-numbing customs of administrative segregation. A year had been added to his life sentence, but under the circumstances it didn't make much difference: his latest adventure had virtually guaranteed that he'd be locked up for the rest of his existence. The question was where. North Dakota has agreements with other states and the federal government whereby prison authorities swap prisoners in a manner resembling player trades by sports franchises. (Ohio, say, sends three convenience-store robbers, two drug dealers, and a parole violator to Illinois in exchange for a couple of auto thieves, an arsonist, and a kidnapper.) While awaiting transfer, McNair burnished his reputation as a selective slow learner. His jailers in Nebraska had accused him of possessing escape materials—two pieces of wire that were considered contraband. Within a month of his return to North Dakota, Warden Schuetzle received a handwritten note from an inmate who reported that McNair had approached him (and, of all people, Rondal Heitsch) asking for help in obtaining hacksaw blades. A month after that, three thirty-inch pieces of wire were confiscated from the binding of a book ("1992 Writer's Market") in McNair's cell. His escape-risk status was upgraded from "very high" to "extremely high," and he was denied access to a computer. Finally, in March, 1994, he was moved to the Minnesota Correctional Facility–Oak Park Heights, in Stillwater.

It took McNair seven years to wear out his welcome in Minnesota—or, maybe, for Minnesota to wear him out. He maintained habits that he'd acquired in Bismarck: he read, exercised rigorously, worked at various industrial jobs, wrote for the prison newspaper, and accumulated college credits (some for courses in criminal justice). At one point, he was officially cited for his "positive attitude"—an appraisal that evidently didn't take into account his Freedom of Information Act request for documents relating to the manhunt following his escape. Which is to say that he made periodic stabs at reëscaping. In November, 1996, he lost his job after being caught trying to fabricate an identification card. Two and a half years later, he waived a hearing and pled guilty to possession of escape materials (a four-yard length of canvas, acrylic paints, gloves, shoe polish)—good for ninety days in solitary.



The severe constraints of Oak Park Heights, a super-maximum-security institution, forced McNair to reconsider his strategy. If he couldn't break out, maybe he could render himself persona non grata. In 2001, he participated in a sit-down strike, an infraction deemed tantamount to inciting a riot, and his reward was a disciplinary transfer back to North Dakota. Not that North Dakota wanted him. Within weeks, he was on his way again, this time to the federal correctional complex in Florence, Colorado.

F.C.C. Florence has three main prisons: medium, high security, and supermax (a.k.a. ADX, a.k.a. the Alcatraz of the Rockies). Since the supermax opened, in 1994, it has housed many of the most notorious criminals in the country: Theodore Kaczynski, the Unabomber; Zacarias Moussaoui, the September 11th conspirator; Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, the Oklahoma City bombers; Ramzi Yousef and Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, the 1993 World Trade Center bombers; Salvatore (Sammy the Bull) Gravano, the Gambino family hit man and squealer. No one has ever escaped from a Florence prison.

No matter where McNair was imprisoned, the North Dakota Department of Corrections retained jurisdiction over him, which meant that out-of-state institutions would file occasional status reports. During his third year in Florence, a treatment counsellor recounted McNair's successful participation in a twelve-month program called CODE (Challenge, Opportunity, Discipline, Ethics). Specifically, he had fulfilled the—no irony intended—"Living Free, Breaking Barriers and Commitment to Change portions of the program." He'd also "completed journals on Personal Change, Rational Self-Counseling, Living with Others, Criminal Lifestyles, Relapse Prevention and Wellness." After McNair's escape last April in Louisiana, the Bureau of Prisons became extremely reticent about him and his history within the federal system. The inspector general of the Department of Justice, which oversees the B.O.P., is investigating the escape. One provocative question concerns whether prison officials were privy to rumors, allegedly circulated three months before McNair escaped, that he was planning to do just that. And how, exactly, did his transfer from Florence to Pollock come about? The official reason was that the move placed McNair closer to his family—in regulatory parlance, "nearer the release destination." Perhaps; by car, Pollock is a hundred and twenty-five miles closer to Duncan, Oklahoma, than Florence is. What's striking is the presumption that McNair would someday be released—hardly an imminent prospect. Given McNair's history, the logical inference is that he recognized—first in Oak Park Heights, and then in Florence—that he was trapped in escape-proof cages. Arguably, he sprang himself from both (albeit in handcuffs and leg restraints), redefining "escape" to mean getting shipped somewhere, anywhere else, on the chance that the next destination would prove more porous. He arrived at Pollock from Florence in September, 2005, and, sure enough, within seven months he was on the loose, jogging down a train track.

OLD WHAT'S HIS NAME
CBarsotti

"My God, I was just wondering what happened to him."

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For the same reason that last April 5th qualifies as the unluckiest day in Carl Bordelon's twenty-year law-enforcement career, it was also probably his luckiest. Bordelon is one of five members of the police department in Ball, Louisiana, a semi-rural suburb in Rapides Parish, about halfway between the city of Alexandria and the much smaller town of Pollock. Shortly after four o'clock that afternoon, as Bordelon cruised through a railroad crossing, he saw a man running toward him wearing baggy cotton shorts, a white tank-top undershirt, cotton gloves, white socks, and tennis shoes.

That morning, McNair had reported to his job in the factory building at Pollock, where he earned forty-six cents an hour repairing U.S. Postal Service mailbags. Refurbished and inspected bags were neatly placed atop pallets, in stacks about four feet high. Each pallet was then shrink-wrapped, forklifted, and loaded onto a truck. In a meticulously wrought ploy reminiscent of "The Count of Monte Cristo"—one that might well have required an accomplice or two—McNair configured the cargo aboard one pallet so that he could hide in a cavity that, even after shrink-wrapping, allowed him to breathe, with the aid of a snorkel-like cardboard tube. Once the truck had moved the pallets to a warehouse on the prison property—but beyond the fence—he broke through the shrink-wrap and slipped away.

The guards at Pollock conduct multiple head counts a day, including five while prisoners are locked in their cells. On April 5th, McNair's absence became apparent during a morning count, but police and sheriff's departments in the vicinity didn't begin receiving phone calls and faxes from the prison notifying them of the escape until almost two o'clock. At that hour, David Covington, the Ball police chief, gathered his staff and distributed copies of a one-sheet alert that included a pixellated, high-contrast, indistinct image of McNair and a rudimentary physical description. The mayor of Ball, Roy Hebron, who also attended the briefing, later said of the picture, "We all laughed about it looking like two or three different people we knew. I told 'em not to go arrest a boy that worked for me just because he fit the description." In search of a better photograph or new information, Covington drove to the prison, where an employee told him that nothing more was available, nor was it certain that McNair had even left the grounds. A little over an hour later, Officer Bordelon, with a copy of the fax in his car, began his conversation with McNair.

The dash-cam video recording of that incident has become an often watched offering on YouTube and similar Internet sites—the police released the video to a local television station—accompanied by viewer comments disparaging Bordelon's professionalism. The general drift is that Barney Fife would have made the collar. It's easy to imagine the recording being appropriated as police-training instructional material, a concise depiction of how to be bamboozled by a sociopath: cop stumbles upon fugitive, has good reason to take him into custody, yet, astonishingly, lets him go. Having watched it now more than twenty times, I find myself at moments talking back to the screen ("Hey! Carl! Eye on the ball!") while inclined toward sympathy for Bordelon. Even more, I marvel at McNair's ability to stay in character.

Before McNair steps into the frame, we see and hear Bordelon, a blond-going-gray fellow in his early forties, of average height and build, the hood of his car in the foreground, a forked road and an approaching pickup truck in the background: "You live around here, buddy?"

"Nope," McNair says, as his hand,

holding a bottle of what looks like an energy drink, and then the rest of him—lean and athletic—comes into view.

"Where you live at?"

"Down the road, by, uh, Pineville."

"Pineville? O.K., do you have any form of identification on you?"

They're standing about three feet apart. McNair says, "No, man."

"What's your name?"

"Robert Jones."

"Robert Jones?"

"Why? Am I not supposed to be on the tracks?"

"No, that's not the problem right now. What's your address?"

"I don't have an address. I'm at the hotel. We're working on, uh, houses and stuff like that, and roofing." He sips from his bottle.

"Roofing?" Bordelon says, flipping away a lit cigarette.

"Yep."

"O.K."

"For my brother."

"All right. Um, what it is, we've got an escapee."

"Oh, shit," McNair says, shaking his head empathically—as if Bordelon had just told him he has a couple of flat tires—and eliciting from the cop an involuntary chuckle. "Where from?"

"A prison."

"There's a prison here?"

McNair looks down the tracks toward where's he just come from, sips again, swings his arms, stays loose. Forty-five seconds have gone by, and, for a guy carrying no identification, with no address and a patently made-up name, he has acquitted himself shrewdly. As the interrogation progresses, he never loses his poise, never threatens, never protests too much. Meanwhile, Bordelon never catches on and never catches up. ("Pineville." "Pineville?" "Robert Jones." "Robert Jones?" "Roofing." "Roofing?") In Oklahoma, McNair's native inflection and idiom were basically the same as in Texas, Arkansas, and central Louisiana. Prison authorities describe McNair as articulate and precise about grammar. With Bordelon, his diction is pure chameleon ole-boy—"supposed" is "spozed," "Pineville" is "Ponville," "where from" is "wur frum"—and his body language is that of an innocent, pleased-to-meetyuh out-of-towner.

On a cell phone, Bordelon calls the sheriff's office of a neighboring parish, hoping for a more detailed description of McNair.

"Hey, this is Carl. . . . Subject wear glasses? . . . Nothing about glasses. . . . Can you find out? I'm out with a white male on the tracks."

Bordelon inspects McNair's hands for tattoos ("Naw, he's clean," he tells the dispatcher); McNair volunteers his age ("Jesus, I'm fifty years old"), adding three years to the truth; Bordelon asks McNair his eye color without getting quite close enough to see for himself, eliciting the "turquoise" response.

"Want to give me some more?" Bordelon says to the dispatcher, chuckling again, betraying his ambivalence; he both does and doesn't want the man standing next to him—now pacing in a relaxed fashion, looking down, extending his arms, then letting them hang at his sides—to be a murderer.

"Call my little brother, man," McNair suggests.

Bordelon listens to the dispatcher for about a minute. Then: "No, short short hair. My guy's got skin-cut hair. He's got a beard, well, uh, goatee-like. . . . How old's that picture?" Another chuckle. "Yeah, I know, I got the same thing. You can't see shit on it."

McNair now understands that neither the cop nor the dispatcher really knows what he looks like. Wrapping up the phone call, Bordelon all but capitulates. "O.K., let me just verify. He says his brother's staying at the motel. Let me verify that and, if so, I'll just cut him loose."

McNAIR: "I guarantee you I'm not . . ."

BORDELON: "You know the bad thing about it?"

"What's that?"

"You're matching up to him." (*Chuckle.*)

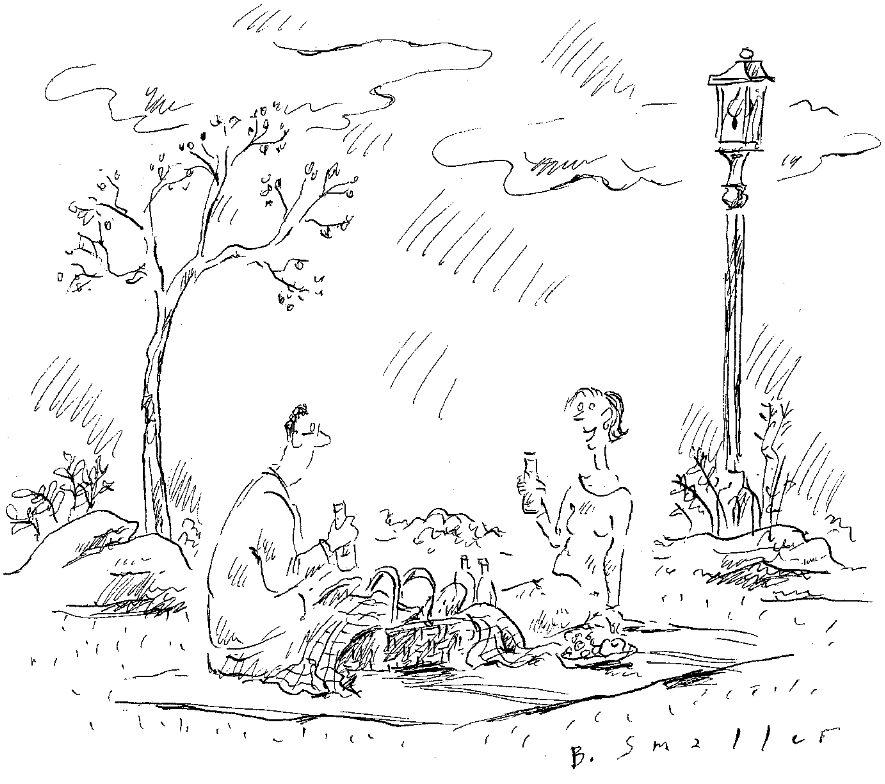
"That sucks, doesn't it?" McNair says, as if discussing a third party.

"Yeah."

Bordelon proceeds to ask purposeful questions—"Where you staying at? Who y'all work for?"—but doesn't quite process the replies.

McNair places his hotel in "Titusville. Titus Inn . . . little ole, little ole town." In fact, the hotel and the town are so little they're invisible; McNair has conjured them.

"Where's that at?" Bordelon asks, but doesn't follow through. He seems to have lost interest in the phantom little brother. The dialogue turns almost desultory—McNair's jogging routine, working conditions for roofers.



"I'm very domestic. I bottle my own water."

BORDELON: "Um, where you from?"

MCNAIR: "Where originally? Dallas, Texas." (A judicious grace note: Dallas, *Texas*—definitive, coöperative.)

BORDELON: "I mean, that's where y'all stay?" (You still awake, Carl?)

"That's where we're out of."

"Out of Dallas, Texas? What's your name again?"

"Jimmy Jones." (Wait. Hold everything. Five minutes ago he was *Robert* Jones. Unholster your gun, Barney! Get him down on the ground! Slap the cuffs on him! . . . Oh, never mind. You two are old pals by now.)

McNair opens his arms wide, palms up, tilts his head pleadingly. And somehow Bordelon becomes defensive, apologetic: "Put yourself in my position."

MCNAIR: "Well, yeah, but I'm not . . ."

BORDELON: "I know. I'm not. I'm not. I'm not throwing you against . . ."

MCNAIR: "I'm not no prison escapee."

BORDELON: "Hey, you wouldn't believe what them guys do. I mean, they got years and years to think about how they gonna do it. When I crossed the tracks down there I saw you running I said, 'Well, how lucky can I be?' "

MCNAIR: "Nope nope nope nope. I'm not no prison escapee."

After another exchange about McNair's fictitious "little ole tiny hotel," he's back to "I promise you I'm not no damn prison escapee."

"You'da done run by now," Bordelon says, and they share a laugh. "You know that yourself. You'da done run by now."

Game, set, match.

A charitable interpretation of this episode is that Bordelon inadvertently saved his own life. Had he been more aggressive or skeptical, McNair might well have reacted violently; one man wore a gun, but the other was plainly in a superior state of readiness. "I think he was really lucky," Lieutenant Clay Brister, of the Rapides Parish Sheriff's Department, said of Bordelon. "Knowing what I know now about McNair, I think he would've killed him. He's just a cool, calm guy. He used everything to his advantage." (During the consequent inconvenience—the most ambitious manhunt in memory in that part of Louisiana—Brister was a field commander.) Within twenty minutes of assuring McNair that he'd be on duty "till we find this son of a gun," Bordelon, back in his patrol car, happened upon a pair of B.O.P. employees, told them about his conversation, showed them the tape, and—*dang*.

For the next two weeks, a mobile command center operated out of a Wal-Mart parking lot. A hundred and fifty law-enforcement officers were deployed, including municipal police, deputy sheriffs, SWAT units, Louisiana State Police, and U.S. Marshals, plus U.S. Forest Service personnel. Roads closed, traffic jammed, unsolicited volunteers materialized, cars were searched, helicopters swarmed, boats patrolled the Red River and Bayou Rigolet. Teams on foot and on horseback or riding all-terrain vehicles scoured the railroad rights-of-way and combed the woods, a bonanza for the resident mosquitoes. Children were kept indoors, windows were nailed shut. The Marshals Service placed McNair on its "15 Most Wanted" list, and a twenty-five-thousand-dollar reward was offered. A car got burglarized here, someone broke into a trailer and stole food and clothing there, laundry vanished from a clothesline, and the ensuing buzz made McNair's capture seem at hand, despite the likelihood that he had long since left the vicinity. Bloodhounds had lost his scent the first day, about a mile from the railroad crossing. No matter—fevered McNair sightings accumulated at a rate that would have amused Elvis. In the end, the last citizen of Louisiana—and, for that matter, the United States—to lay eyes definitively on Richard McNair was the outfoxed Officer Bordelon.

McNair was next heard from, in a manner of speaking, ten days after the escape: a letter bearing a Corpus Christi postmark reached his mother, in Oklahoma. She shared it with the U.S. Marshals, and, for several days, the focus of the manhunt shifted to South Texas. Once McNair's name found its way into the headlines there, more imaginary sightings proliferated—at a McDonald's on South Padre Island (where McNair, in his letter, had said he was hiding out); on a street in Brownsville; in a bar in San Antonio. Brownsville, on the Rio Grande, made sense if you believed that McNair had gone to Mexico, which the letter to his mother indicated that he planned to do. What made even more sense—what, predictably, turned out to be the case—was that the South Texas hubbub was a diversion, an echt-McNair maneuver. ("He went *that* way!") Hadn't he spent eighteen years working on his game?

Whatever he learned along the way has, thus far, given him more leverage than any intelligence the U.S. Marshals gathered when they went to McNair's home town to try to get a fix on whom, exactly, they were looking for. McNair wouldn't qualify as the most celebrated son or daughter of Duncan, Oklahoma (those distinctions belong to the filmmaker Ron Howard and the former Ambassador to the U.N. Jeane Kirkpatrick), but, thanks to his recurring appearances on the Fox television series "America's Most Wanted," he's the leading candidate for most notorious. Except that no one there has much to say about him. The Duncan *Banner*, a daily, devoted a hundred and thirty-one words to his escape, including this elliptical reference: "McNair reportedly has family living in the Duncan area."

The family—Rick, as he was called, was the oldest of the four McNair boys—moved to Duncan from Altus, ninety miles to the west, during the sixties, when he was in grade school. His father, Jim, managed a jewelry store downtown, and his mother, Willene, babysat for preschoolers in the family's home, a modest brick tract house in an other-side-of-the-tracks quarter of an unassuming little city. (Duncan, population twenty-two thousand, owes its existence mainly to the oil boom that hit in the early nineteen-twenties, when what eventually became the Halliburton Company set up shop there as an oil-well-servicing contractor, decades before it moved its headquarters to Texas.) The McNairs were well regarded ("real good people," one business owner told me); they were churchgoers in a community with a remarkable abundance of churches, and civically active. (Jim has spent many years as an auxiliary policeman.) Today, the McNair name is known mainly because two of Rick's brothers operate a tire business and a small used-car lot at the north end of town. In the eighties, Jim and Willene divorced, and she stayed on in the house. When I knocked on the front door early last summer, a car was parked in the driveway, but no one responded. When

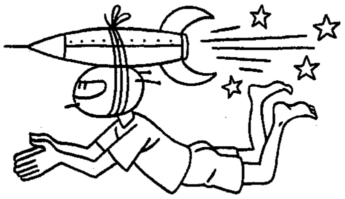
I later phoned, Willene said that she didn't want to talk. Her former husband was equally unforthcoming. One of Rick's brothers politely told me, "It's been twenty-five years since he left here. People here don't even know we're related. And this is just stirring the pot."

The Duncan High School yearbook for 1977, McNair's senior year, lists no extracurricular activities for him. The only photograph other than his graduation portrait shows him at a flower shop, then owned by a woman named Carole Brymer, where he had an after-school job. It was Mrs. Brymer, now retired and living in Oklahoma City, who recalled for me his "outgoing, lovable personality." The most detailed lode of biographical information I came across was a report from the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation to the North Dakota Bureau of Investigation in the spring of 1988, when McNair was being held in the Ward County Jail. According to the report, McNair, while still in high school, was a d.j. at a local radio station. In both Duncan and Edmond, an exurb of Oklahoma City, he sold new cars for various dealerships (and learned things about automobiles that no doubt came in handy later, whenever he needed to steal one). For a couple of years, he attended a state college in Edmond. At twenty-one, he married a woman three years younger who lived across the street and had also worked at the flower shop. The marriage lasted a year and a half. His ex-wife bore him no animosity. Though they often fought, he never hit her. ("She described him as a good husband," the investigator wrote.) He liked guns. Occasionally, he would browse in a pawnshop, and he once bought a small pistol. As a boy, he'd learned from his father how to shoot, first with a .22 and then with a .38. The teen-age McNair "never had any problems with the law," his ex-wife stated, a symptom either of forgetfulness or obliviousness. Similarly, Mrs. Brymer told me that "Rick had never been in any trouble that I knew of, and in Duncan you'd hear those things."

Unless you didn't. During his senior year in high school, after he and a cohort stole a siren and a red light from the car of an auxiliary cop named Tiny Duvall, McNair was charged with burglary. Another time, they stole a car in a nearby town, brought it to Duncan, and burned it. He was a suspect in the theft of a safe and a truck from a utility company; despite ample evidence, the local district attorney didn't file charges. The sum of these transgressions sounds like an advanced case of juvenile delinquency, mitigated in the eyes of prosecutors, perhaps, by the delinquent's affable persona and ostensible capacity for shame. (McNair's ex-wife recalled that he described the auto-theft-and-arson stunt "as something stupid that he should not have done, and added that it was wrong.")

How to extrapolate from these relatively minor offenses to serial burglary-for-the-hell-of-it and impulsive, cold-blooded murder? McNair's subsequent behavior suggests that what he really thought was wrong was getting caught. When that happened, it surely made Duncan seem even smaller than it was. (A life defined by confinement: a town where too many people know your secrets, a premature marriage, a seven-by-ten cell? Not at all what he had in mind.) Enlisting in the military, which he did soon after his divorce, offered an expeditious way to leave a place and a past behind. During the years before he became a killer, his return visits were infrequent. Now it would logically be the last place on his itinerary from Louisiana to wherever he was headed next. Someone in Duncan who knew the family well assured me that if he came to town they'd "do the right thing" and "turn him in."

By the time I visited Duncan, I believed that I knew where McNair was as well as anyone (except McNair himself). The previous week, I'd flown to Vancouver, British Columbia, rented a car, and driven away from the coast, toward the Rockies. Just east of Vancouver I passed through Surrey, a suburb where, on April 20th—five days after the postmark date of the letter mailed to McNair's mother from Corpus Christi—he had stolen a Pontiac Grand Am. Eight days later, he was parked in a cul-de-sac on the shore of Skaha Lake, in the town of Penticton, in the Okanagan Valley. The car had license plates that he'd stolen in Kamloops, a hundred and fifty miles to the northwest. I drove five hours, through the Lillooet Range, expecting Penticton to be an outpost in wild, inhospitable terrain, and found instead a busy, densely settled tourist destination, popular with retirees (and that particular weekend—*hmm*—a convention of Elvis impersonators), in a rich agricultural region: apple, peach, apricot, and cherry orchards, and fields of strawberries, raspberries, and blueberries. The Okanagan Valley ("Canada's Napa") is a temperate glacial basin that runs north-south and extends into Washington State. The nearest border station is on its main artery, Highway 97, at Osoyoos, British Columbia–Oroville, Washington, an hour away. (In the opposite direction, Highway 97 eventually becomes the Alaska Highway.) Wherever McNair had crossed into Canada, he'd almost certainly done so by hiking through the bush.



At 10 P.M. on April 28th, two members of a citizens' patrol, swinging through a parking lot next to a sandy lakeside beach and a paved walkway, saw the Grand Am, punched its license number into their Palm Pilot, learned that it was stolen, and notified the local Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Two Mounties arrived and approached the car; a man was inside and they asked him to step out. Within seconds, McNair took off running. It was dark, and the lodgepole pines and cedars along the shore provided cover. A police dog helped with the search, but McNair was McNair. A more intensive hunt wasn't mustered because the Mounties assumed that they were dealing with nothing more than a fleet-footed middle-aged car thief. They impounded the vehicle.

The next night, one of the officers happened to watch that week's installment of "America's Most Wanted" and recognized McNair. Time to take a much closer look at the Grand Am. Inside, the R.C.M.P. found three laptop computers (two stolen, one paid for), Canadian currency, receipts that delineated the path of McNair's travels, fingerprints, and a digital camera storing head shots of a clean-shaven McNair—perfect for a fake I.D. They also found a cell phone that McNair had bought using the name Tim Schuetzle (the North Dakota warden). It took a week for a forensic lab to confirm that the fingerprints—copies of which it had received from the U.S. Marshals—were his. Bulletins about McNair were sent to the Canadian media and posted on the R.C.M.P. Web site. Again, sightings multiplied, all over the map. A surveillance camera in a Wal-Mart in Penticton had recorded a clear image of McNair. More speculative reports came from Bella Coola (nearly six hundred miles to the northwest) and Anahim Lake (not far from Bella Coola). That same week in late May, a difficult-to-reconcile alleged sighting originated near Kananaskis, Alberta, three hundred and fifty miles to the east. Glenn Belgard, a deputy U.S. Marshal in Louisiana, said, "We're looking for Santa Claus, but if we see a man in a red suit with a sleigh and reindeer we're not going to say it's him until we're sure beyond a shadow of a doubt."

"Isn't it about time to switch from your warm-weather chair to your cold-weather chair?"

Michelle Sigona, a correspondent for "America's Most Wanted" who has followed the McNair case, told me in midsummer that she had accumulated a six-inch-thick file of tips from viewers, all of which she'd shared with Belgard and the R.C.M.P. "I look at the details in the tips," she said. "People say they're a hundred and ten per cent sure that this was a great sighting. Some are very generic and they give theories. But we've gotten a lot of tips that I think look good from people who truly believe they've seen him."

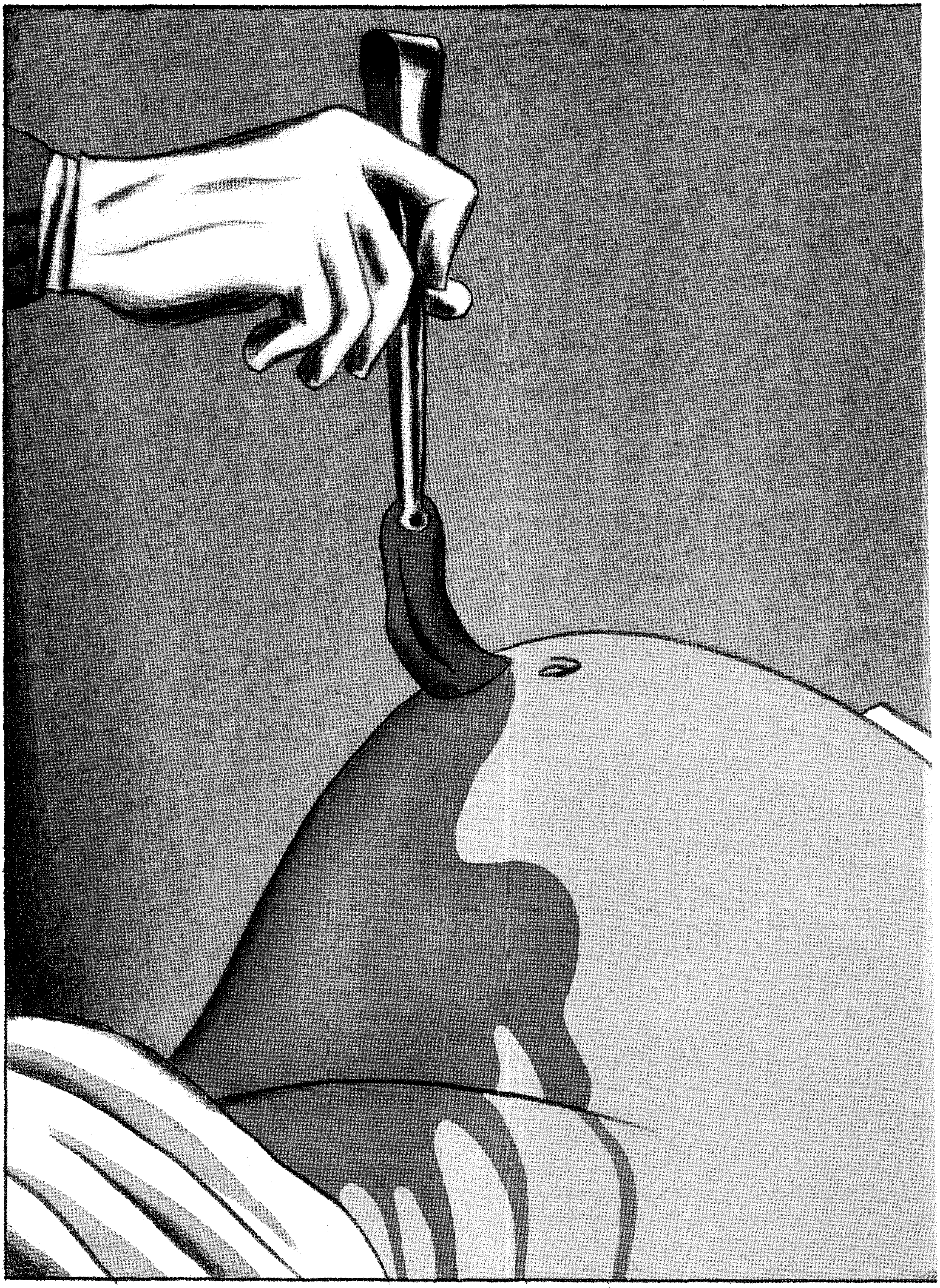
What the Canadian sightings have in common is that, in each locale, the coming winter will be far less tolerable than in the Okanagan Valley. Hypothetically, the easiest place to hide out in North America might be the Yukon Territory; the farther north you go, the fewer questions get asked—the upside of frostbite. Explaining the low crime rate in North Dakota, Vern Erck, the sheriff of Ward County and the lead investigator of McNair's original crimes, said, "We have a saying: 'Forty below keeps the riffraff out.'" Which suggests that before McNair was fingered in pleasant Penticton he might well have been planning to stick around.

After McNair's most recent escape, Sheriff Erck received a visit from an Air Force veteran named Ray Miller, who, after a varied career, now has a civilian job at Minot Air Force Base. Miller recounted to Erck—and later to me—his experiences with McNair, whom he thought he'd known well until the instant it became obvious that he didn't know him at all. He recalled being astounded by the news of McNair's arrest in 1988. They'd been working together for a few months and had immediately become, in Miller's mind, friends.

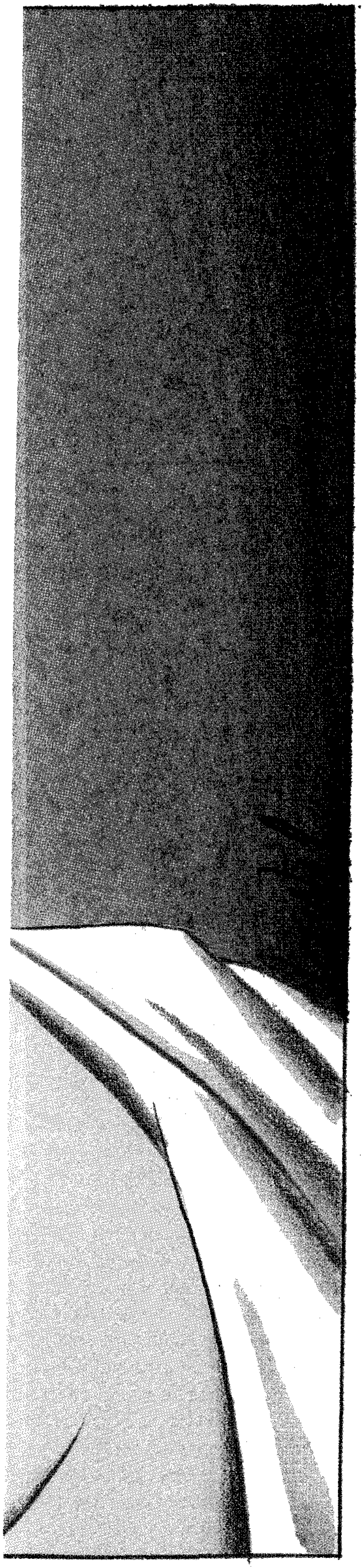
"He was the nicest kid," he said. "He was so much fun to be around. We'd go to lunch, joke around. I invited him to the house, but I don't think he ever came. I've been a high-school teacher for about eight years, and I have never, with the exception of two other students, felt that somebody had as high an intellect as him. I've been wrong about people, but I can't quite believe I would be that wrong. This was the biggest what-the-heck in my life. 'Come on over, meet the wife and kids . . .' You don't invite somebody over if you think they're gonna kill your family. So I was mistaken. His whole relationship with me was a lie. But he was that good at being a multiple personality. It's as if he picks up on what you're thinking and becomes what you want him to be."

For a couple of years, while a student at Minot State University, in the early nineties, Miller drove a grain truck part time and made pickups, for delivery to the Twin Cities, from the Farmers Union elevator: "When I loaded over there, I would always think—every time—Yep. Hey, that could have been me. Thinking about him lately, I come back to that. I couldn't believe that someone who was that great a guy could do what he did. Then I have to ask: what was real?

"When he got away this last time, I realized they're never gonna catch him. Because he's so good. He can become someone completely different than who he was. The way he wins is by not being caught. At the same time, he has nothing to lose—he's only going to wind up in the same spot as before. It's like when you're playing blackjack and you're ahead, so now you're playing with the house's money. You can split some crazy cards. And when you do that crazy stuff you usually win." ♦



JACQUES DE LOUSTAL



ANNALS OF MEDICINE

THE SCORE

How childbirth went industrial.

BY ATUL GAWANDE

At 5 A.M. on a cool Boston morning not long ago, Elizabeth Rourke—thick black-brown hair, pale Irish skin, and forty-one weeks pregnant—reached over and woke her husband, Chris.

"I'm having contractions," she said.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"I'm sure."

She was a week past her due date, and the pain was deep and viselike, nothing like the occasional spasms she'd been feeling. It seemed to come out of her lower back and wrap around and seize her whole abdomen. The first spasm woke her out of a sound sleep. Then came a second. And a third.

She was carrying their first child. So far, the pregnancy had gone well, aside from the exhaustion and nausea of the first trimester, when all she felt like doing was lying on the couch watching "Law & Order" reruns ("I can't look at Sam Waterston anymore without feeling kind of ill," she says). An internist who had just finished her residency, she had landed a job at Massachusetts General Hospital a few months before and had managed to work until this day. Rourke and her husband sat up in bed, timing the contractions by the clock on the bedside table. They were seven minutes apart, and they stayed that way for a while.

Rourke called her obstetrician's office at eight-thirty in the morning, when the phones were turned on, but she knew what the people there were going to say: Don't come to the hospital until the contractions are five minutes apart and last at least a minute. "You take the childbirth class, and they drill it into you a million times," she says. "The whole point of childbirth classes, as far as I could tell, is to make sure you keep your butt out of the hospital until you're really in labor."

The nurse asked if the contractions were five minutes apart and lasted more than a minute. No. Had she broken her water? No. Well, she had a "good start." But she should wait to come in.

During her medical training, Rourke had seen about fifty births and had delivered four babies herself. The last one she had seen was in a hospital parking lot.

"The father had called, saying, 'We're delivering! We're coming to the hospital, and she's delivering!' " Rourke says. "So we were in the E.R. and we went running. It was freezing cold. The car came screeching up to the hospital. The door went flying open. And, sure enough, there the mom was. We could see the baby's head. The resident running next to me got there a second before I did, and he puts his arms down, and the baby went—*phhhoom*—straight into his arms in the middle of the parking lot. It was freezing cold outside, and I'll never forget the steam pouring off the baby. It's blue and crying and the steam was pouring off of it. Then we put this tiny little baby on this enormous stretcher and raced it back into the hospital."

Rourke didn't want to deliver in a parking lot. She wanted a nice, normal vaginal delivery. She didn't even want an epidural. "I didn't want to be confined to bed," she says. "I didn't want to be dead from the waist down. I didn't want a urinary catheter to have to be put in. Everything about the epidural was totally unappealing to me." She was not afraid of the pain. Having seen how too many deliveries had gone, she was mainly afraid of losing her ability to control what was done to her.

She had considered hiring a doula—a birthing coach—to stay with her through delivery. There are studies showing that having a doula can lower the likelihood that a mother will end up with a Cesarean section or an epidural. The more she looked into it, however, the more worried

Obstetrics has been condescended to as the least scientific field of medicine. Yet its rate of progress—its success in reducing the risks of childbirth—puts other fields to shame.

she became about being paired with someone annoying. She thought about delivering with a midwife. But, as a doctor, she felt that she would actually have more control working with another doctor.

By midday, her contractions hadn't really speeded up; they were still coming every seven minutes, maybe every six at most. She was finding it increasingly difficult to get comfortable. "The way it felt best was, strangely enough, to be on all fours," she recalls. So she just hung around the house like that—on all fours during the contractions, her husband close by, both of them nervous and giddy about their baby being on the way.

Finally, at four-thirty in the afternoon, the contractions began coming five minutes apart, and they set off in their Jetta, with the infant car seat installed in the back. When they reached the hospital admissions desk, Rourke was ready. The baby was on the way, and she was eager to bring it into the world as nature had intended.

"I wanted no intervention, no doctors, no drugs," she says. "I didn't want any of that stuff. In a perfect world, I wanted to have my baby in a forest bower attended by fairy sprites."

Human birth is an astonishing natural phenomenon. Carol Burnett once told Bill Cosby how he could understand what the experience was like. "Take your bottom lip," she said, "pull it as far away from your face as you can, and now pull it over your head." The process is a solution to an evolutionary problem: how a mammal can walk upright, which requires a small, fixed, bony pelvis, and also possess a large brain, which entails a baby whose head is too big to fit through that small pelvis. Part of the solution is that, in a sense, all human mothers give birth prematurely. Other mammals are born mature enough to walk and seek food within hours; our newborns are small and helpless for months. Even so, human birth is a feat involving an intricate sequence of events.

First, a mother's pelvis enlarges. Starting in the first trimester, maternal hormones allow the joints holding the four bones of the pelvis together to stretch and loosen. Almost an inch of space is added. Pregnant women sometimes feel the different parts of their pelvis moving when they walk.

Then, when it's time for delivery, the uterus changes. During gestation, it's a snug, rounded, hermetically sealed pouch; during labor it takes on the shape of a funnel. And each contraction pushes the baby's head down through that funnel, into the pelvis. This happens even in paraplegic women; the mother does not have to do anything.

Meanwhile, the cervix—which is, through pregnancy, a rigid, inch-thick cylinder of muscle and connective tissue capping the end of the funnel—softens and relaxes. Pressure from the baby's head gradually stretches the tissue until it is paper-thin—a process known as "effacement." A small circular opening appears, and each contraction widens it, like a tight shirt being pulled over a child's head. Until the contractions pull the cervix open about four inches, or ten centimetres—the diameter of the child's head—the child cannot get out. So the state of the cervix determines when birth will occur. At two or three centimetres of dilation, a mother is still in "early" labor. Delivery is many hours away. At between four and seven centimetres, the contractions grow stronger, and "active" labor has begun. At some point, the amniotic sac breaks under the pressure, and the clear fluid surrounding the fetus gushes out. Contractile force increases further.

At between seven and ten centimetres of cervical dilation, the "transition phase," contractions reach their greatest intensity. The contractions press the baby's head into the vagina and the narrowest part of the pelvis's bony ring. The pelvis is usually wider from side to side than front to back, so it's best if the baby emerges with the temples lined up side to side with the mother's pelvis. The top of the head comes into view. The mother has a mounting urge to push. The head comes out, then the shoulders, and suddenly a breathing, wailing child is born. The umbilical cord is cut. The placenta separates from the uterine lining, and, with a slight tug on the cord and a push from the mother, it is extruded. The uterus spontaneously contracts into a clenched ball of muscle, closing off its bleeding sinuses. Typically, the mother's breasts immediately let down colostrum, the first milk, and the newborn can latch on to feed.

That's if all goes well. At almost any step, though, the process can go wrong. For thousands of years, childbirth was the most common cause of death for young women and infants. There's the risk of hemorrhage. The placenta can tear, or separate, or a portion may remain stuck in the uterus after delivery and then bleed torrentially. Or the uterus may not contract after delivery, so that the raw surfaces and sinuses keep bleeding until the mother dies of blood loss. Sometimes the uterus ruptures during labor.

Infection can set in. Once the water breaks, the chances that bacteria will get into the uterus rise with each passing hour. During the nineteenth century,

"When he's awake, he can work circles around me."

people started to realize that doctors often spread bacteria, because they examined more infected patients than midwives did and failed to wash their contaminated hands. Bacteria routinely invaded and killed the fetus and, often, the mother with it. Puerperal fever was the leading cause of maternal death in the era before antibiotics. Even today, if a mother doesn't deliver within twenty-four hours after her water breaks, she has a forty-per-cent chance of becoming infected.

The most basic problem is "obstruction of labor"—not being able to get the baby out. The baby may be too big, especially when pregnancy continues beyond the fortieth week. The mother's pelvis may be too small, as was frequently the case when lack of vitamin D and calcium made rickets common. The baby might arrive at the birth canal sideways, with nothing but an arm sticking out. It could be a breech, coming butt first and getting stuck with its legs up on its chest. It could be a footling breech, coming feet first, but then getting wedged at the chest with the arms above the head. It could come out head first but get stuck because the head is turned the wrong way. Sometimes the head makes it out, but the shoulders get stuck behind the pubic bone of the mother's pelvis.

These situations are dangerous. When a baby is stuck, the umbilical cord, the only source of fetal blood and oxygen, eventually becomes trapped or compressed, causing the baby to asphyxiate. Mothers have sometimes labored for astonishing lengths of time, unable to deliver, and died with their child in the process. In 1817, for example, Princess Charlotte of Wales, King George IV's twenty-one-year-old daughter, spent fifty hours in active labor with a nine-pound boy. His head was in a sideways position, and too large for Charlotte's pelvis. When he finally emerged, he was stillborn. Six hours later, Charlotte herself died, from hemorrhagic shock. She was King George's only legitimate child. The throne passed to his brother, and then to his niece—which is how Victoria became queen.

Midwives and doctors had long sought ways out of such disasters, and the history of obstetrics is the history of these efforts. The first reliably life-saving invention for mothers was called a crochet, or, in another variation, a cranioclast: a sharp-pointed instrument, often with clawlike hooks, which birth attendants used in desperate situations to perforate and crush a fetus's skull, extract the fetus, and save the mother's life.

Many obstetricians made their names by devising methods to get both mother and baby through an obstructed delivery. In the Lovset maneuver for a breech baby with its arms trapped above the head, you take the baby by the hips and turn it sideways, then reach in, take an upper arm, and sweep it down over the chest and out. If a breech baby's arms are out but the head is trapped, you have the Mauriceau-Smellie-Veit maneuver: you place your finger in the baby's mouth, which allows you to pull forcefully while still controlling the head.

The child with its head out but a shoulder stuck—a "shoulder dystocia"—will asphyxiate within five to seven minutes unless it is freed and delivered. Sometimes sharp downward pressure with a fist just above the mother's pubic bone can dislodge the shoulder; if not, there is the Woods corkscrew maneuver, in which you reach in, grab the baby's posterior shoulder, and push it backward to free the child. With the Rubin maneuver, you grab the anterior shoulder and push it forward toward the baby's chest; and with the McRoberts maneuver you sharply flex the mother's legs up onto her abdomen and so lift her pubic bone off the baby's shoulder. Finally, there is the maneuver that no one wanted to put his name to but that through history has saved many babies' lives: you fracture the clavicles—the collar bones—and pull the baby out.

There are dozens of these maneuvers, and, though they have saved the lives of countless babies, each has a high failure rate. Surgery has been known since ancient times as a way to save a trapped baby. Roman law in the seventh century B.C. forbade burial of an undelivered woman until the child had been cut out, in the hope that the child would survive. In 1614, Pope Paul V issued a similar edict, and ordered that the child be baptized if it was still alive. But Cesarean section on a living mother was considered criminal for much of history, because it almost always killed the mother—through hemorrhage and infection—and her life took precedence over that of the child. (The name "Cesarean" section may have arisen from the tale that Caesar was born of his mother, Aurelia, by an abdominal delivery, but historians regard the story as a myth, since Aurelia lived long after his birth.) Only after the development of anesthesia and antisepsis, in the nineteenth century, and, in the early twentieth century, of a double-layer suturing technique that could stop an opened uterus from hemorrhaging, did Cesarean section become a tenable option. Even then it was held in low repute. And that was because a better option was around: the obstetrical forceps.

The story of the forceps is both extraordinary and disturbing, because it is the story of a life-saving idea that was kept secret for more than a century. The instrument was developed in the seventeenth century by Peter Chamberlen (1560-1631), the first of a long line of French Huguenots who delivered babies in London. It looked like a pair of big metal salad tongs, with two blades shaped to fit snugly around a baby's head and handles that locked together with a single screw in the middle. It let doctors more or less yank stuck babies out and, carefully applied, was the first technique that could save both the baby and the mother. The Chamberlens knew that they were onto something, and they resolved to keep the device a family secret. Whenever they were called in to help a mother in obstructed labor, they ushered everyone else out of the room and covered the mother's lower half with a sheet or a blanket so that even she couldn't see what was going on. They kept the secret of the forceps for three generations. In 1670, Hugh Chamberlen, in the third generation, tried and failed to sell it to the French government. Late in his life, he divulged it to an Amsterdam-based surgeon, Roger van Roonhuysen, who kept the technique within his own family for sixty more years. The secret did not get out until the mid-eighteenth century. Once it did, it gained wide acceptance. At the time of Princess Charlotte's failed delivery, in 1817, her obstetrician, Sir Richard Croft, was widely reviled for failing to use forceps. He shot himself to death not long afterward.

By the early twentieth century, the problems of human birth seemed to have been largely solved. Doctors could avail themselves of a range of measures to insure a safe delivery: antiseptics, the forceps, blood transfusions, a drug (ergot) that could induce labor and contract the uterus after delivery to stop bleeding, and even, in desperate situations, Cesarean section. By the nineteen-thirties, most urban mothers had switched from midwife deliveries at home to physician deliveries in the hospital.

But in 1933 the New York Academy of Medicine published a shocking study of 2,041 maternal deaths in childbirth. At least two-thirds, the investigators found, were preventable. There had been no improvement in death rates for mothers in the preceding two decades; newborn deaths from birth injuries had actually increased. Hospital care brought no advantages; mothers were better off delivering at home. The investigators were appalled to find that many physicians simply didn't know what they were doing: they missed clear signs of hemorrhagic shock and other treatable conditions, violated basic antiseptic standards, tore and infected women with misapplied forceps. The White House followed with a similar national report. Doctors may have had the right tools, but midwives without them did better.

The two reports brought modern obstetrics to a turning point. Specialists in the field had shown extraordinary ingenuity. They had developed the knowledge and instrumentation to solve many problems of child delivery. Yet knowledge and instrumentation had proved grossly insufficient. If obstetrics wasn't to go the way of phrenology or trepanning, it had to come up with a different kind of ingenuity. It had to figure out how to standardize childbirth. And it did.

Three-quarters of a century later, the degree to which birth has been transformed by medicine is astounding and, for some, alarming. Today, electronic fetal-heart-rate monitoring is used in more than ninety per cent of deliveries; intravenous fluids in more than eighty per cent; epidural or spinal anesthesia in three-quarters; medicines to speed up labor (the drug of choice is no longer ergot but Pitocin, a synthetic form of the natural hormone that drives contractions) in half. Thirty per cent of American deliveries are now by Cesarean section, and that proportion continues to rise. Something has happened to the field of obstetrics—and, perhaps irreversibly, to childbirth itself.

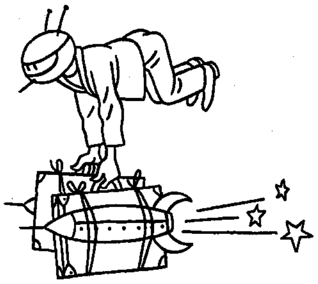
An admitting clerk led Elizabeth Rourke and her husband into a small triage room. A nurse-midwife timed her contractions—they were indeed five minutes apart—and then did a pelvic examination to see how dilated Rourke was. After twelve hours of regular, painful contractions, Rourke figured that she might be at seven or eight centimetres. Instead, she was at two.

It was disheartening news: her labor was only just starting. The nurse-midwife thought about sending her home, but eventually decided to admit her to the labor floor, a horseshoe of twelve patient rooms strung around a nurses' station. For hospitals, deliveries are a good business. If mothers have a positive experience, they stay loyal to the hospital for years. So the rooms are made to seem as warm and inviting as possible. Each had recessed lighting, decorator window curtains, comfortable chairs for the family, individualized climate control. Rourke's even had a Jacuzzi. She spent the next several hours soaking in the tub, sitting on a rubber birthing ball, or walking the halls—stopping to brace herself with each contraction.

By ten-thirty that night, the contractions were coming every two minutes. The doctor on duty for her obstetrician's group performed a pelvic examination. Her cervix was still only two centimetres dilated: the labor had stalled.

The doctor gave her two options. She could have active labor induced with Pitocin. Or she could go home, rest, and wait for true labor to begin. Rourke did not like the idea of using the drug. So at midnight she and her husband went home.

No sooner was she home than she realized that she had made a mistake. The pain was too much. Chris had conked out on the bed, and she couldn't get through this on her own. She held out for two and a half more hours, just to avoid looking foolish, and then got Chris to drive her back. At 2:43 A.M., the nurse scanned her in again—she was still wearing her bar-coded hospital identification bracelet. The obstetrician reëxamined her. Rourke was nearly four centimetres dilated. She had progressed to active labor.



But at this point she had been having regular contractions for twenty-two hours, and was exhausted from sleeplessness and pain. She tried a narcotic called Nubain to dull the pain, and when that didn't work she broke down and asked for an epidural. An anesthesiologist came in and had her sit on the side of the bed with her back to him. She felt a cold wet swipe of antiseptic along her spine, the pressure of a needle, and a twinge that shot down her leg; the epidural catheter was in. The doctor injected a bolus of local anesthetic into the Silastic tubing, and the pain of the contractions melted away into numbness. Then Rourke's blood pressure dropped—a known side effect of epidural injections. The team poured fluids into her intravenously and gave injections of ephedrine to increase her and her baby's blood pressure. It took fifteen minutes to stabilize her blood pressure. But the monitor showed that the baby's heart rate remained normal the whole time, about a hundred and fifty beats a minute. The team dispersed and finally, around 4 A.M., Rourke fell asleep.

At 6 A.M., the obstetrician returned and, to Rourke's dismay, found her still just four centimetres dilated. Her determination to avoid medical interventions ebbed further, and a Pitocin drip was started. The contractions surged. At 7:30 A.M., she was six centimetres dilated. Rourke was elated.

Dr. Alessandra Peccei took over with the new day, and looked at the whiteboard behind the nursing station where the hourly progress of each room is recorded. On a typical morning, a mother in one room might be pushing; in another, a mother might be having her labor induced with medication; in still another, a mother might be just waiting, her cervix only partially dilated and the baby still high. Rourke was a "G2P0 41.2 wks pit+ 6/100/-2" on the whiteboard—a mother with two gestations, zero born (Rourke had had a miscarriage), forty-one weeks and two days pregnant. She was on Pitocin. Her cervix was six centimetres dilated and a hundred per cent effaced. The baby was at negative-two station, which is about seven centimetres from crowning, that is, from becoming visible.

Peccei went into Rourke's room and introduced herself as the attending obstetrician. Peccei, who was forty-two years old and had delivered more than two thousand babies, projected a comforting combination of competence and friendliness. She had given birth to her own children with a midwife. Rourke felt that they understood one another.

Peccei waited three hours to allow Rourke's labor to progress. At 10:30 A.M., she reëxamined her, and frowned. The cervix was still six centimetres dilated. The baby had not come down any further. Peccei felt along the top of the baby's head for the soft spot in back to get a sense of which way it was facing, and found it facing sideways. The baby was stuck.

"Is this your wife?"

Sometimes increasing the strength of the contractions can turn the baby's head in the right direction and push it along. So, using a gloved finger, Peccei punctured the bulging membrane of Rourke's amniotic sac. The waters burst, and immediately the contractions picked up strength and speed, but the baby did not budge. Worse, its heart rate began to drop with each contraction—120, 100, 80 the monitor went, taking almost a minute before returning to normal. It's not always clear what dips like these mean. Malpractice lawyers like to say that they are a baby's "cry for help." In some cases, they are. An abnormal tracing can signal that a baby is getting an inadequate supply of oxygen or blood—the baby's cord may be wrapped around its neck or getting squeezed off altogether. But usually, even when the heart rate takes a prolonged dive, lasting well past the end of a contraction, the baby is fine. A drop in heart rate is often simply what happens when a baby's head is squeezed really hard.

Dr. Peccei couldn't be sure which was the case. She turned off the Pitocin drip, to reduce the strength of the contractions. She gave Rourke, and therefore the baby, extra oxygen by nasal prong. She scratched at the baby's scalp to irritate it and confirmed that the baby's heart rate responded. The heart rate continued to drop during contractions, but it never failed to recover. After twenty-five minutes, the decelerations disappeared.

Now what? Rourke had been in labor for thirty hours, and her baby didn't seem to be going anywhere.

There are a hundred and thirty million births around the world each year, more than four million of them in the United States. No matter what is done, some percentage will end badly. All the same, physicians have long had an abiding faith that they could step in and at least reduce that percentage. When the national reports of the nineteen-thirties proved that obstetrics had failed to do so, and that incompetence was an important reason, the medical profession turned to a strategy of instituting strict regulations on individual practice. Training requirements were established for physicians delivering babies. Hospitals set firm rules about who could do deliveries, what steps they had to follow, and whether they would be permitted to use forceps and other risky interventions. Hospital and state authorities investigated maternal deaths for aberrations from basic standards.

These standards reduced the number of maternal deaths substantially. In the mid-thirties, delivering a child had been the single most dangerous event in a woman's life: one in a hundred and fifty pregnancies ended in the death of the mother. By the fifties, owing in part to the tighter standards, and in part to the discovery of penicillin and other antibiotics, the risk of death for a mother had fallen more than ninety per cent, to just one in two thousand.

But the situation wasn't so encouraging for newborns: one in thirty still died at birth—odds that were scarcely better than those of the century before—and it wasn't clear how that could be changed. Then a doctor named Virginia Apgar, who was working in New York, had an idea. It was a ridiculously simple idea, but it transformed obstetrics and the nature of childbirth. Apgar was an unlikely revolutionary for obstetrics. For starters, she had never delivered a baby—not as a doctor and not even as a mother.

Apgar was one of the first women to be admitted to the surgical residency at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, in 1933. The daughter of a Westfield, New Jersey, insurance executive, she was tall and would have been imposing if not for her horn-rimmed glasses and bobby-pinned hair. She had a combination of fearlessness, warmth, and natural enthusiasm that drew people to her. When anyone was having troubles, she would sit down and say, "Tell Momma all about it." At the same time, she was exacting about everything she did. She wasn't just a talented violinist; she also made her own instruments. She began flying single-engine planes at the age of fifty-nine. When she was a resident, a patient she had operated on died after surgery. "Virginia worried and worried that she might have clamped a small but essential artery," L. Stanley James, a colleague of hers, later recalled. "No autopsy permit could be obtained. So she secretly went to the morgue and opened the operative incision to find the cause. That small artery had been clamped. She immediately told the surgeon. She never tried to cover a mistake. She had to know the truth no matter what the cost."

THE GALLANT NEEDFUL

The hat hasn't worn too well. Nor, come to think
of it, have the pants. The shirt and cap are negligible.
As for the drawers . . .
So it went. Time was running
downhill while the clothes gave out. No one
wanted to wear them anymore, which was
understandable, given that clothes are a going concern
to many. Mended with gay stuffs, they'll serve
another time, tied like shawls around
a stovepipe.
Farewell nightmares, simulacra.
All the time a little is growing. As soup is to stew,
so the sea to bubbling chasms that prop up the "meaning."
Nice is nice enough. Just don't expect thanks.

—*John Ashbery*

At the end of her surgical residency, her chairman told her that, however good she was, a female surgeon had little chance of attracting patients. He persuaded her to join Columbia's faculty as an anesthesiologist, then a position of far lesser status. She threw herself into the job, and became the second woman in the country to be board-certified in anesthesiology. She established anesthesia as its own division at Columbia and, eventually, as its own department, on an equal footing with surgery. She administered anesthesia to more than twenty thousand patients during her career. She even carried a scalpel and a length of tubing in her purse, in case a passerby needed an emergency airway—and, apparently, employed them successfully more than a dozen times. "Do what is right and do it now," she used to say.

Throughout her career, the work she loved most was providing anesthesia for child deliveries. But she was appalled by the poor care that many newborns received. Babies who were born malformed or too small or just blue and not breathing well were listed as stillborn, placed out of sight, and left to die. They were believed to be too sick to live. Apgar believed otherwise, but she had no authority to challenge the conventions. She was not an obstetrician, and she was a female in a male world. So she took a less direct, but ultimately more powerful, approach: she devised a score.

The Apgar score, as it became known universally, allowed nurses to rate the condition of babies at birth on a scale from zero to ten. An infant got two points if it was pink all over, two for crying, two for taking good, vigorous breaths, two for moving all four limbs, and two if its heart rate was over a hundred. Ten points meant a child born in perfect condition. Four points or less meant a blue, limp baby.

The score was published in 1953, and it transformed child delivery. It turned an intangible and impressionistic clinical concept—the condition of a newly born baby—into a number that people could collect and compare. Using it required observation and documentation of the true condition of every baby. Moreover, even if only because doctors are competitive, it drove them to want to produce better scores—and therefore better outcomes—for the newborns they delivered.

Around the world, virtually every child born in a hospital had an Apgar score recorded at one minute after birth and at five minutes after birth. It quickly became clear that a baby with a terrible Apgar score at one minute could often be resuscitated—with measures like oxygen and warming—to an excellent score at five minutes. Spinal and then epidural anesthesia were found to produce babies with better scores than general anesthesia. Neonatal intensive-care units sprang into existence. Prenatal ultrasound came into use to detect problems for deliveries in advance. Fetal heart monitors became standard. Over the years, hundreds of adjustments in care were made, resulting in what's sometimes called "the obstetrics package." And that package has produced dramatic results. In the United States today, a full-term baby dies in just one out of five hundred childbirths, and a mother dies in one in ten thousand. If the statistics of 1940 had persisted, fifteen thousand mothers would have died last year (instead of fewer than five hundred)—and a hundred and twenty thousand newborns (instead of one-sixth that number).

There's a paradox here. Ask most research physicians how a profession can advance, and they will talk about the model of "evidence-based medicine"—the idea that nothing ought to be introduced into practice unless it has been properly tested and proved effective by research centers, preferably through a double-blind, randomized controlled trial. But, in a 1978 ranking of medical specialties according to their use of hard evidence from randomized clinical trials, obstetrics came in last. Obstetricians did few randomized trials, and when they did they ignored the results. Careful studies have found that fetal heart monitors provide no added benefit over having nurses simply listen to the baby's heart rate hourly. In fact, their use seems to increase unnecessary Cesarean sections, because slight abnormalities in the tracings make everyone nervous about waiting for vaginal delivery. Nonetheless, they are used in nearly all hospital deliveries. Forceps have virtually disappeared from the delivery wards, even though several studies have compared forceps delivery to Cesarean section and found no advantage for Cesarean section. (A few found that mothers actually did better with forceps.)

Doctors in other fields have always looked down their masked noses on their obstetrical colleagues. Obstetricians used to have trouble attracting the top medical students to their specialty, and there seemed little science or sophistication to what they did. Yet almost nothing else in medicine has saved lives on the scale that obstetrics has. Yes, there have been dazzling changes in what we can do to treat disease and improve people's lives. We now have drugs to stop strokes and to treat cancers; we have coronary-artery stents, artificial joints, and mechanical respirators. But those of us in other fields of medicine don't use these measures anywhere near as reliably and as safely as obstetricians use theirs.

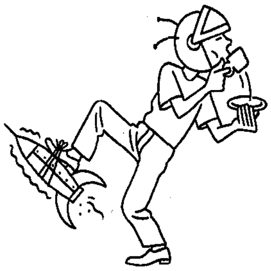
Ordinary pneumonia, for instance, remains the fourth most common cause of death in affluent countries, and the death rate has actually worsened in the past quarter century. That's in part because pneumonias have become more severe, but it's also because we doctors haven't performed all that well. Research trials have shown that patients who are hospitalized with pneumonia are less likely to die if the right antibiotics are started within four hours of their arrival. But we pay little attention to what happens in practice. A recent study has shown that forty per cent of pneumonia patients do not get the antibiotics on time. When we do give the antibiotics, twenty per cent of patients get the wrong kind.

In obstetrics, meanwhile, if a strategy seemed worth trying doctors did not wait for research trials to tell them if it was all right. They just went ahead and tried it, then looked to see if results improved. Obstetrics went about improving the same way Toyota and General Electric did: on the fly, but always paying attention to the results and trying to better them. And it worked. Whether all the adjustments and innovations of the obstetrics package are necessary and beneficial may remain unclear—routine fetal heart monitoring is still controversial, for example. But the package as a whole has made child delivery demonstrably safer and safer, and it has done so despite the increasing age, obesity, and consequent health problems of pregnant mothers.

The Apgar score changed everything. It was practical and easy to calculate, and it gave clinicians at the bedside immediate information on how they were doing. In the rest of medicine, we measure dozens of specific things: blood counts, electrolyte levels, heart rates, viral titers. But we have no measure that puts them together to grade how the patient as a whole is faring. It's like knowing, during a basketball game, how many blocked shots and assists and free throws you have had, but not whether you are actually winning. We have only an impression of how we're performing—and sometimes not even that. At the end of an operation, have I given my patient a one-in-fifty chance of death, or a one-in-five-hundred chance? I don't know. I have no feel for the difference along the way. "How did the surgery go?" the patient's family will ask me. "Fine," I can only say.

The Apgar effect wasn't just a matter of giving clinicians a quick objective read of how they had done. The score also changed the choices they made about how to do better. When chiefs of obstetrics services began poring over the Apgar results of their doctors and midwives, they started to think like a bread-factory manager taking stock of how many loaves the bakers burned. They both want solutions that will lift the results of every employee, from the novice to the most experienced. That means sometimes choosing reliability over the possibility of occasional perfection.

The fate of the forceps is a revealing example. I spoke to Dr. Watson Bowes, Jr., an emeritus professor of obstetrics at the University of North Carolina and the author of a widely read textbook chapter on forceps technique. He started practicing in the nineteen-sixties, when fewer than five per cent of deliveries were by C-section and more than forty per cent were with forceps. Yes, he said, many studies did show fabulous results for forceps. But they only showed how well forceps deliveries could go in the hands of highly experienced obstetricians at large hospitals. Meanwhile, the profession was being held responsible for improving Apgar scores and mortality rates for newborns everywhere—at hospitals small and large, with doctors of all levels of experience.



"Forceps deliveries are very difficult to teach—much more difficult than a C-section," Bowes said. "With a C-section, you stand across from the learner. You can see exactly what the person is doing. You can say, 'Not there. *There.*' With the forceps, though, there is a feel that is very hard to teach." Just putting the forceps on a baby's head is tricky. You have to choose the right one for the shape of the mother's pelvis and the size of the child's head—and there are at least half a dozen types of forceps. You have to slide the blades symmetrically along the sides, travelling exactly in the space between the ears and the eyes and over the cheekbones. "For most residents, it took two or three years of training to get this consistently right," he said. Then a doctor must apply forces of both traction and compression—pulling, his chapter explained, with an average of forty to seventy pounds of axial force and five pounds of fetal skull compression. "When you put tension on the forceps, you should have some sense that there is movement." Too much force, and skin can tear, the skull can fracture, a fatal brain hemorrhage may result. "Some residents had a real feel for it," Bowes said. "Others didn't."

The question facing obstetrics was this: Is medicine a craft or an industry? If medicine is a craft, then you focus on teaching obstetricians to acquire a set of artisanal skills—the Woods corkscrew maneuver for the baby with a shoulder stuck, the Lovset maneuver for the breech baby, the feel of a forceps for a baby whose head is too big. You do research to find new techniques. You accept that things will not always work out in everyone's hands.

But if medicine is an industry, responsible for the safest possible delivery of millions of babies each year, then the focus shifts. You seek reliability. You begin to wonder whether forty-two thousand obstetricians in the U.S. could really master all these techniques. You notice the steady reports of terrible forceps injuries to babies and mothers, despite the training that clinicians have received. After Apgar, obstetricians decided that they needed a simpler, more predictable way to intervene when a laboring mother ran into trouble. They found it in the Cesarean section.

Just after seven-thirty, in the thirty-ninth hour of labor, Elizabeth Rourke had surgery to deliver her baby. Dr. Peccei had offered her the option of a Cesarean eight hours before, but Rourke refused. She hadn't been ready to give up on pushing her baby out into the world, and, though the doctor doubted that Rourke's efforts would succeed, the baby was doing fine on the heart monitor. There was no harm in Rourke's continuing to try. The doctor increased the Pitocin dose gradually, until it was as high as the baby's heart rate allowed. Despite the epidural, the contractions became fiercely painful. And there was progress: by 3 P.M., Rourke's cervix had dilated to eight centimetres. The contractions had pushed the baby forward two centimetres. Even Peccei began to think that Rourke might actually make the delivery happen.

Three hours later, however, the baby's head was no lower and was still sideways; Rourke's cervix hadn't dilated any further. When Dr. Peccei offered her a Cesarean again, she accepted, gratefully.

The Pitocin drip was turned off. The contraction monitor was removed. There was just the swift *tock-tock-tock* of the fetal heart monitor. Peccei introduced a colleague who would do the operation—Rourke had been in labor so long she'd gone through three shifts of obstetricians. She was wheeled to a spacious, white-tiled operating room down the hall. Her husband, Chris, put on green scrubs, a tie-on mask, a bouffant surgical cap, and blue booties over his shoes. He took a chair next to her at the head of the operating table and placed his hand on her shoulder. The anesthesiologist put extra medication in her epidural and pricked at the skin of her belly to make sure that the band of numbness was wide enough. The nurse painted her skin with a yellow-brown antiseptic. Then the cutting began.

The Cesarean section is among the strangest operations I have seen. It is also one of the most straightforward. You press a No. 10 blade down through the flesh, along a side-to-side line low on the bulging abdomen. You divide the skin and golden fat with clean, broad strokes. Using a white gauze pad, you stanch the bleeding points, which appear like red blossoms. You slice through the fascia covering the abdominal muscle, a husk-like fibrous sheath, and lift it to reveal the beefy red muscle underneath. The rectus abdominis muscle lies in two vertical belts that you part in the middle like a curtain, metal retractors pulling left and right. You cut through the peritoneum, a thin, almost translucent membrane. Now the uterus—plum-colored, thick, and muscular—gapes into view. You make a small initial opening in the uterus with the scalpel, and then you switch to bandage scissors to open it more swiftly and easily. It's as if you were cutting open a tough, leathery fruit.

Then comes what still seems surreal to me. You reach in, and, instead of finding a tumor or some other abnormality, as surgeons usually do when we go into someone's belly, you find five tiny wiggling toes, a knee, a whole leg. And suddenly you realize that you have a new human being struggling in your hands. You almost forget the mother on the table. The infant can sometimes be hard to get out. If the head is deep in the birth canal, you have to grasp the baby's waist, stand up straight, and *pull.* Sometimes you have to have someone push on the baby's head from below. Then the umbilical cord is cut. The baby is swaddled. The nurse records the Apgar score.

After the next uterine contraction, you deliver the placenta through the wound. With a fresh gauze pad, you wipe the inside of the mother's uterus clean of clots and debris. You sew it closed with two baseball-stitched layers of stout absorbable suture. You sew the muscle fascia back together with another suture, then sew the skin. And you are done.

This procedure, once a rarity, is now commonplace. Whereas before obstetricians learned one technique for a foot dangling out, another for a breech with its arms above its head, yet another for a baby with its head jammed inside the pelvis, all tricky in their own individual ways, now the solution is the same almost regardless of the problem: the C-section. Every obstetrician today is comfortable doing a C-section. The procedure is performed with impressive consistency.

Straightforward as these operations are, they can go wrong. The child can be lacerated. If the placenta separates and the head doesn't come free quickly, the baby can asphyxiate. The mother faces significant risks, too. As a surgeon, I have been called in to help repair bowels that were torn and wounds that split open. Bleeding can be severe. Wound infections are common. There are increased risks of blood clots and pneumonia. Even without any complication, the recovery is weeks longer and more painful than with vaginal delivery. And, in future pregnancies, mothers can face serious difficulties. The uterine scar has a one-in-two-hundred chance of rupturing in an attempted vaginal delivery. There's a similar risk that a new baby's placenta could attach itself to the scar and cause serious bleeding problems. C-sections are surgery. There is no getting around it.

Yet there's also no getting around C-sections. We have reached the point that, when there's any question of delivery risk, the Cesarean is what clinicians turn to—it's simply the most reliable option. If a mother is carrying a baby more than ten pounds in size, if she's had a C-section before, if the baby is lying sideways or in a breech position, if she has twins, if any number of potentially difficult situations for delivery arise, the standard of care requires that a midwife or an obstetrician at least offer a Cesarean section. Clinicians are increasingly reluctant to take a risk, however small, with natural childbirth.

I asked Dr. Bowes how he would have handled obstructed deliveries like Rourke's back in the sixties. His first recourse, as you'd expect, would have included forceps. He had delivered more than a thousand babies with forceps, he said, with a rate of neonatal injury as good as or better than with Cesarean sections, and a far faster recovery for the mothers. Had Rourke been under his care, the odds are excellent that she could have delivered safely without surgery. But Bowes is a virtuoso of a difficult instrument. When the protocols of his profession changed, so did he. "As a professor, you have to be a role model. You don't want to be the cowboy who goes in to do something that your residents are not going to be able to do," he told me. "And there was always uncertainty." Even he had to worry that, someday, his judgment and skill would fail him.

These were the rules of the factory floor. To discourage the inexpert from using forceps—along with all those eponymous maneuvers—obstetrics had to discourage everyone from using them. When Bowes finished his career, in 1999, he had a twenty-four-per-cent Cesarean rate, just like the rest of his colleagues. He has little doubt that he'd be approaching thirty per cent, like his colleagues today, if he were still practicing.

A measure of how safe Cesareans have become is that there is ferocious but genuine debate about whether a mother in the thirty-ninth week of pregnancy with no special risks should be offered a Cesarean delivery as an alternative to waiting for labor. The idea seems the worst kind of hubris. How could a Cesarean delivery be considered without even trying a natural one? Surgeons don't suggest that healthy people should get their appendixes taken out or that artificial hips might be stronger than the standard-issue ones. Our complication rates for even simple procedures remain distressingly high. Yet in the next decade or so the industrial revolution in obstetrics could make Cesarean delivery consistently safer than the birth process that evolution gave us.

Currently, one out of five hundred babies who are healthy and kicking at thirty-nine weeks dies before or during childbirth—a historically low rate, but obstetricians have reason to believe that scheduled C-sections could avert at least some of these deaths. Many argue that the results for mothers are safe, too. Scheduled C-sections are certainly far less risky than emergency C-sections—procedures done quickly, in dire circumstances, for mothers and babies already in distress. One recent American study has raised concerns about the safety of scheduled C-sections, but two studies, one in Britain and one in Israel, actually found scheduled C-sections to have *lower* maternal mortality than vaginal delivery. Mothers who undergo planned C-sections may also (though this remains largely speculation) have fewer problems later in life with incontinence and uterine prolapse.

And yet there's something disquieting about the fact that childbirth is becoming so readily surgical. Some hospitals are already doing Cesarean sections in more than half of child deliveries. It is not mere nostalgia to find this disturbing. We are losing our connection to yet another natural process of life. And we are seeing the waning of the art of childbirth. The skill required to bring a child in trouble safely through a vaginal delivery, however unevenly distributed, has been nurtured over centuries. In the medical mainstream, it will soon be lost.

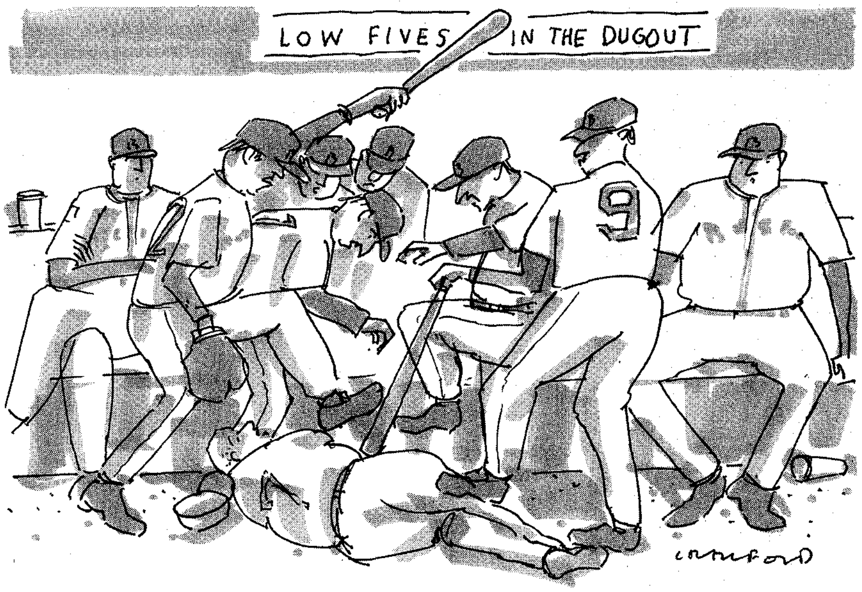
Skeptics have noted that Cesarean delivery is suspiciously convenient for obstetricians' schedules and, hour for hour, is paid more handsomely than vaginal birth. Obstetricians say that fear of malpractice suits pushes them to do C-sections more frequently than even they consider necessary. Putting so many mothers through surgery is hardly cause for celebration. But our deep-seated desire to limit risk to babies is the biggest force behind its prevalence; it is the price exacted by the reliability we aspire to.

In a sense, there is a tyranny to the score. Against the score for a newborn child, the mother's pain and blood loss and length of recovery seem to count for little. We have no score for how the mother does, beyond asking whether she lived or not—no measure to prod us to improve results for her, too. Yet this imbalance, at least, can surely be righted. If the child's well-being can be measured, why not the mother's, too? Indeed, we need an Apgar score for everyone who encounters medicine: the psychiatry patient, the patient on the hospital ward, the person going through an operation, and the mother in childbirth. My research group recently came up with a surgical Apgar score—a ten-point surgical rating based on the amount of blood loss, the lowest heart rate, and the lowest blood pressure that a patient experiences during an operation. We still don't know if it's perfect. But all patients deserve a simple measure that indicates how well or badly they have come through—and that pushes the rest of us to innovate.

"I watched, you know," Rourke says. "I could see the whole thing in the surgical lights. I saw her head come out!" Katherine Anne was seven pounds, fifteen ounces at birth, with brown hair, blue-gray eyes, and soft purple welts where her head had been wedged sideways deep inside her mother's pelvis. Her Apgar score was eight at one minute and nine at five minutes—nearly perfect.

Her mother had a harder time. "I was a wreck," Rourke says. "I was so exhausted I was basically stuporous. And I had unbearable pain." She'd gone through almost forty hours of labor and a Cesarean section. Dr. Peccei told her the next morning, "You got whipped two ways, and you are going to be a mess." She was so debilitated that her milk did not come in.

"I felt like a complete failure, like everything I had set out to do I failed to do," Rourke says. "I didn't want the epidural and then I begged for the epidural. I didn't want a C-section, and I consented to a C-section. I wanted to breast-feed the baby, and I utterly failed to breast-feed." She was miserable for a week. "Then one day I realized, 'You know what? This is a stupid thing to think. You have a totally gorgeous little child and it's time to pay more attention to your totally gorgeous little child.' Somehow she let me put all my regrets behind me." ♦

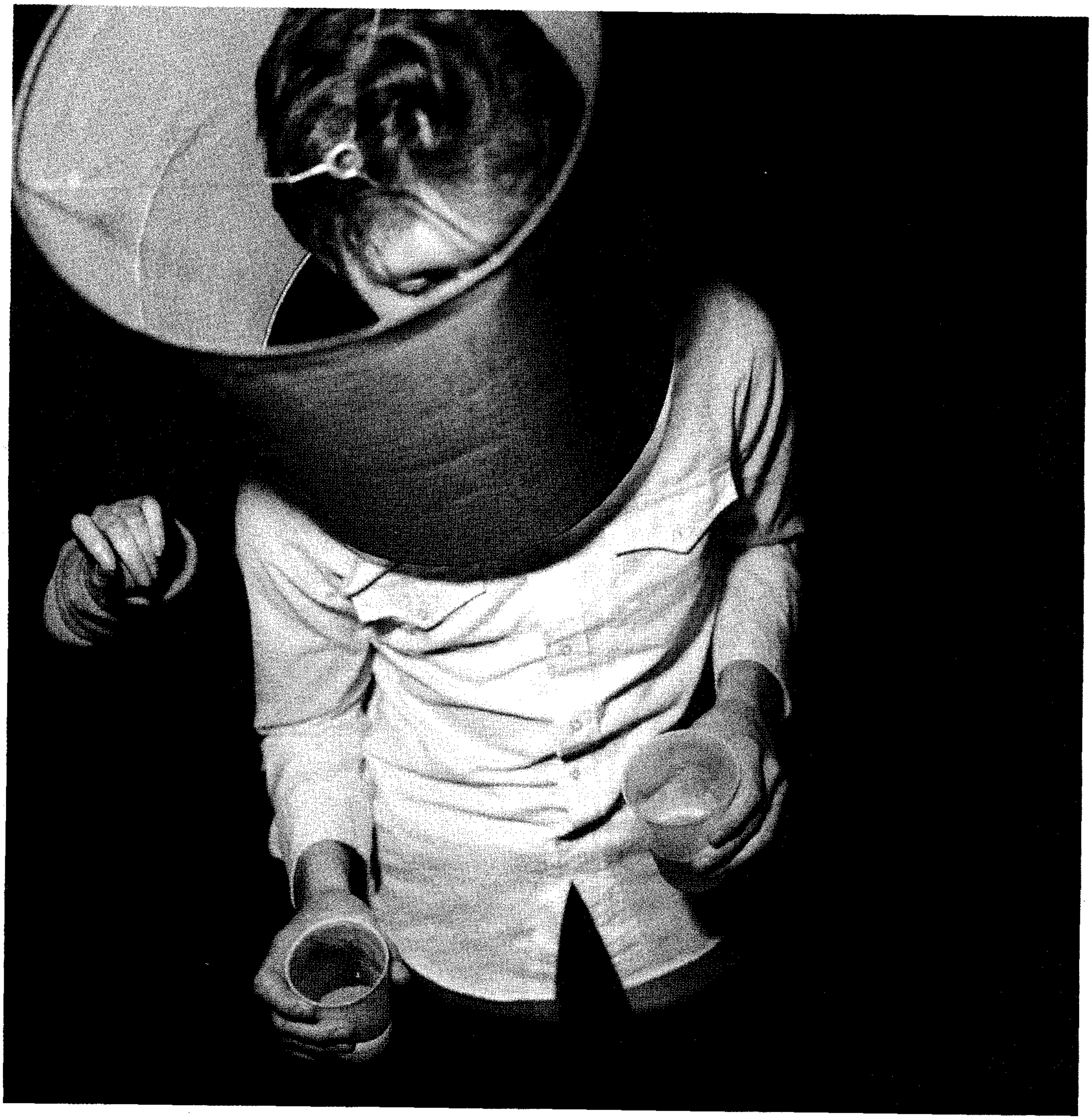

LOW FIVES IN THE DUGOUT
9

"That's for missing the bunt sign!" "Yeah, and that's for striking out on ball four, you loser!"

FICTION

LANDFILL

BY JOYCE CAROL OATES



Tioga County landfill is where Hector, Jr., is found. Or his "remains"—battered and badly decomposed, his mouth filled with trash. He couldn't have protested if he'd been alive, buried, as he was, in rubble and raw garbage. Overhead are shrieking birds; in the vast landfill, dump trucks and bulldozers and a search team from the Tioga County Sheriff's Department in protective uniforms. For three weeks, Hector's disappearance was in all the newspapers and on TV. Most of his teeth are broken at the roots, but those which remain are sufficient to identify Hector Campos, Jr., of Southfield, Michigan. Nineteen years old, a freshman engineering student at Michigan State University at Grand Rapids, reported missing by his dormitory roommates in the late afternoon of Monday, March 27th, but said to have last been seen around 2 A.M. Saturday, March 25th, in the parking lot behind the Phi Epsilon fraternity house, on Pitt Avenue. And now, in the early morning of April 17th, Mrs. Campos answers the phone on the first ring. These terrible weeks that her son has been missing, Mrs. Campos has answered the phone many times and made many calls, as her husband has made many calls, and now the call from the Tioga County Sheriff's Department they have been dreading. *Mrs. Campos? Are you seated? Is your husband there?*

Mrs. Campos is not seated but standing, barefoot and only partly clothed, shivering, with matted hair and glazed eyes, her mouth tasting of scum from the hateful medication that has not yet helped her to sleep. Mr. Campos, hurriedly descending the stairs in rumpled boxer shorts and a sweated-through undershirt, says, "Irene, what is it? Who is it?" and rudely pries her icy fingers off the receiver. The Tioga County landfill, approximately eighty miles from the Campos home: how soon can Mr. and Mrs. Campos drive to the morgue to corroborate the identification?

Of course, the body has "badly decomposed," so Mr. Campos views it alone, through a plate-glass partition, while Mrs. Campos waits in another room. *Remains!* What is this strange, unfathomable word? Mrs. Campos whispers it aloud: "remains." She seems to have stumbled into a rest room, white tiled walls, door locked behind her, and the light switch triggering a fierce overhead fan that blows freezing antiseptic air: the stark settings to which, on a weekday at 10 A.M., emergency brings us. Why is Irene Campos here? Why has this happened? Is this a public rest room? Where?

STEPHEN MALLON / GETTY IMAGES

Elsewhere, Mr. Campos observes the body laid upon a table beneath glaring lights, most of it shielded by a sheet so that only the head, or what remains of the head, is exposed. How is it possible that these "remains" are Hector, Jr., who once was a hundred and seventy-five pounds of solid flesh, who was, like his father, slightly soft at the waist, short-legged, with thick thighs, a wrestler's build (though Hector, Jr., who'd wrestled for Southfield High in his senior year, had not made the wrestling team at Grand Rapids)? What now remains of Hector, Jr., could not weigh more than ninety pounds, yet his father recognizes him at once, the shock of it like an electric current piercing his heart: the battered and mutilated and partially eaten-away face, the empty eye sockets. Oh, God, it is Hector, his son.

Mr. Campos can barely murmur "Yes," turns away quivering with pain. "Yes, that is Hector, Jr." Mr. Campos will never be the same again—now that he's a man who has lost his son, his soul cauterized, telling his anxious wife, "Don't ask, don't speak to me, please," even as she loses control. "Are you sure it's our son, I want to see him, what if there's a mistake, a tragic mistake, you know you make mistakes, why would Hector be in that terrible place, how has this happened, how has God let this happen, I want to see our son."

Hector, Jr. Called by school friends Heck or Scoot. Within the Campos family, sometimes called Junior (which he hated, as soon as he was old enough to register the insult) and sometimes Little Guy (until the age of twelve, when Hector, Jr., was no longer what one would call "little"), more often simply Hector. At Grand Rapids, Hector, Jr., was called Hector by his professors, Scoot by his fellow-pledges at Phi Epsilon, and Campos by the older Phi Epsilons he so admired and wished to emulate. *Campos was a good guy, great sense of humor, terrific Phi Ep spirit. Of the pledges, Campos was, like, the most loyal. Seems like a tragedy, a weird accident, what happened to him, but it didn't happen at the frat house, that's for sure.*

On the Hill, partying begins Thursday night. Mostly, you blow off your Friday classes, which for Scoot Campos were classes he'd got into the habit of cutting, anyway: Intro Electrical Engineering, taught by a foreigner (Indian? Pakistani? whatever) who spoke a rapid, heavily accented English that baffled and offended the sensitive ears of certain Michigan-born students, including Hector Campos, Jr., whose midterm exam was returned to him with the blunt red numeral 71; and Intro Computer Technology, in which, though the course was taught by a Caucasian American male who spoke crisp English, he was pulling a C, C-minus. *Probably, yes, Scoot had been drinking that night, maybe more than he could handle, not in the dorm here but over at the frat house. Most weekends he'd come back to the dorm pretty wasted, and, yes, that was kind of a problem for us. But basically Scoot was a good kid. Just maybe in over his head a little. Freshman engineering can be tough if you don't have the math, and even if you do.*

His roommates in Brest Hall reported him missing late Monday afternoon. They guessed something might be wrong, called the frat house, but there was no answer. Scoot's things were exactly as he'd left them sometime Saturday afternoon, and it wasn't like Scoot to stay over at the frat house on a Sunday night, or through Monday. He was only a pledge and didn't have a bed there, and he'd missed four Monday classes.

Weeks later, Mr. and Mrs. Campos are signing forms in the Tioga County Morgue, as through the twenty-two years of their marriage they have signed so many forms—mortgage papers, homeowner's insurance, life insurance, medical insurance, their son's college-loan application at Midland Michigan Bank. Hector Campos, Sr., one of the most reliably high-performing salespersons at Southfield Chrysler, at least until recently, has often lain sleepless in his king-size bed in the gleaming-white, aluminum-sided Colonial at 23 Quail Circle, Whispering Woods Estates of Southfield, his thoughts racing like panicked ants, his head ringing with the crazed demand for money, always more money. Apart from the sum quoted by the university admissions office for tuition, there was room and board, textbooks, "fees" for fraternity rush, for fraternity pledging, a startlingly high fee (payable in advance, Hector, Jr., said) for fraternity initiation in May. "Send the check to me, Dad. Make it out to Phi Epsilon Fraternity, Inc., and send it to me, Dad. Please!"

Mrs. Campos, lonely since Hector, Jr., left for college, took up the campaign, excited and reproachful. She pleaded and argued on Hector's behalf. "If you refuse Hector you will shame him in the eyes of his friends, you will break his heart. This fraternity—Pi Episom, Pi Epsilom?—this fraternity means more to him than anything else in his life right now. If you refuse him he will never forgive you, and I will never forgive you."

Only when Mrs. Campos threatened to borrow the fifteen hundred dollars from her parents did Mr. Campos give in, disgusted, defeated—as so often through the years, if a man wishes to preserve his marriage, he gives in. *Married for love—does that mean for life? Can love prevail through life?*

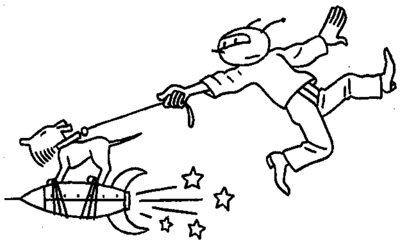
Now, in the chilled antiseptic air of the Tioga County medical examiner's office, Mr. and Mrs. Campos are co-signing documents in triplicate that will release the "remains" of Hector Campos, Jr., for burial (in St. Joseph's Cemetery, Southfield) after the medical examiner has filed his final report. The police investigation has yet to determine whether Hector died in the early hours of March 25th in the steep-sided Dumpster behind the Phi Epsilon frat house—where investigators found stains and swaths of blood, as if made by wildly thrashing bloody wings—or whether he died as many as forty-eight hours later, after lying unconscious, possibly comatose from brain injuries, until Monday morning, and then being hauled away unseen beneath mounds of trash, cans, bottles, Styrofoam and cardboard packages, rancid raw garbage, stained and filthy clothing, and paper towels soaked in vomit, urine, even feces. At approximately 6:45 A.M. on March 27th, he was dumped into the rear of a thunderous Tioga County Sanitation Department truck and hauled sixteen miles north of the city to the Packard Road recycling transfer station, to be compacted and then hauled away again to the gouged, misshapen, ever-shifting landscape of the Tioga County landfill.

Carefully, the Tioga County sheriff has explained that "foul play" has not been ruled out as a possibility, though the medical examiner has determined that the "massive injuries" to the body of Hector Campos, Jr., are "compatible" with injuries that would have been caused by the trash-compacting process. A more complete autopsy may yield new information. The police investigation will continue, and the university administration will convene an investigating committee. As many as a hundred college students have been interviewed: Hector's roommates, classmates, Phi Epsilon pledges and brothers, even Hector's professors, who take care to speak of him in the neutral terms befitting one who has suffered a terrible but inexplicable—and blameless—fate. *Jesus! You have to hope that the poor bastard died right away, smashed out of his mind, diving down the trash chute into the Dumpster and breaking his neck on contact.* Only the police investigators can bring themselves to imagine that Hector Campos, Jr., may have been "compacted" while still alive.

During the strain, anxiety, and insomniac misery of the three-week search, Mrs. Campos was fierce and frantic with hope, holding prayer vigils at St. Joseph's Church. Relatives, neighbors, and parish members lit votive candles, for God is a God of mercy as well as wrath, while she hid her face in prayer. *God, let Hector return to us, send Hector back to us, Hail Mary full of grace the Lord is with thee blessed art thou among women pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, amen.*

Mrs. Campos would forever relive the shock of that call out of nowhere: a man, identifying himself as an assistant dean at the university, and Mrs. Campos saying, "Yes? Yes, I am Hector's mother," drawing a quick short breath. "Is something wrong?"

In weak moments, she imagined the possibility of a phone call bearing different news. The possibility of subsequent phone calls bearing different news. For it was crucial, during those days, those interminable stretches of (open-eyed, exhausted) time, to believe that Hector was alive. *Our son is alive!* She had only to shut her eyes to see him as he looked when he came home for a few days the previous month—his frowning smile, such a handsome boy. Mrs. Campos always had to tell him how handsome he was. Hector had hated his "fat face" since puberty, his "beak nose," his "ape forehead, like Dad's." Mrs. Campos winced at such words, pulled at Hector's hands when, unconsciously, he dug and picked at his nose. Any serious discussion between them had to be initiated by Mrs. Campos, and then only gingerly, for her son so quickly took offense. "Jesus, Mom, lighten up, will you? Must've missed your call—what's the big deal, this crappy cell phone you bought me." And Mrs. Campos cried, "But I love you! We love you," but her words were muffled. She was sweating and thrashing in her sleep; the nightmare had not lifted. She had to keep the flame alive those terrible days, weeks.

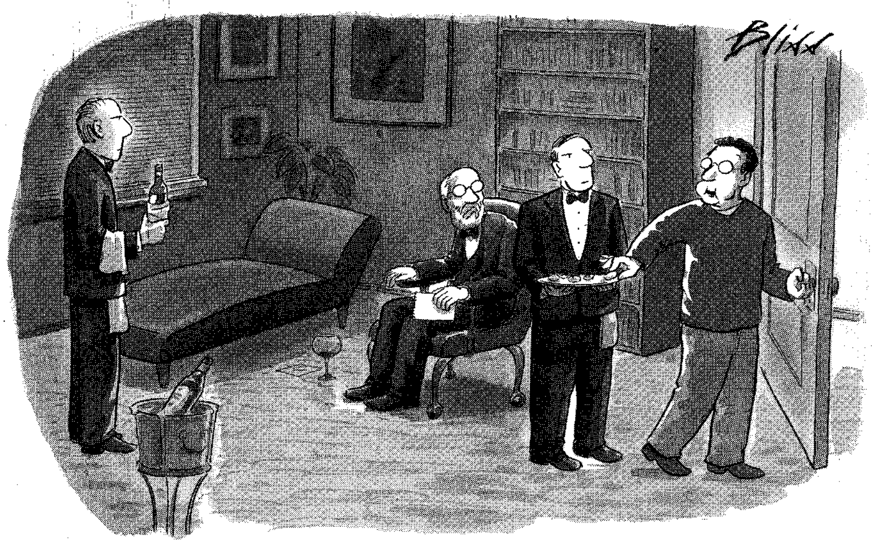


At Easter Sunday Mass, she shut her eyes tight, but this time saw only Hector, Jr.,'s grimace—how he'd hated going to church. In recent years he'd refused altogether, even refused midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. Mrs. Campos had been so ashamed, so hurt. Now she was kneeling at the Communion rail, hiding her hot-skinned face in her hands, her numbed lips moving rapidly in prayer. She was dazed and desperate, snatching at prayer as you'd snatch at something for balance. The tranquillizers she was taking had affected her balance, her sense of her (physical) self; there was a buzzing in her head. *Please help us, please do not abandon us in our hour of need.* She looked up as the elderly priest made his way to her, and craned her neck like a starving bird, opening her mouth to take the doughy white Communion wafer on her tongue, her dry, dry tongue. *This is my body, and this is my blood.*

She was half fainting then, in ill-chosen patent-leather pumps, staggering away from the Communion rail, into the aisle, all eyes fixed on the heavily made-up woman with so clearly dyed, dark-red hair, a middle-aged fleshiness to her face, bruiselike circles beneath her eyes, and quickly there came Mr. Campos to help the swaying woman back to the family pew, fingers gripping her arm at the elbow. Hector Campos, Sr.! Father of the missing boy! Swarthy-skinned, with dark wiry hair, a low forehead crisscrossed with lines, and large, oddly simian ears protruding from the sides of his head. There was a grim set to the man's mouth, a flush of indignation or impatience, as Mrs. Campos confusedly struggled with him as if to wrench her arm out of his grip, as if he were hurting her.

In the car driving home, Mrs. Campos dissolved into hysteria, screaming, "You don't have faith! You've given up faith, I hate you!" For it was crucial to believe, as Mrs. Campos believed, that, nearly three weeks after Hector, Jr., "disappeared," he might yet be found unharmed. He might yet call his anxious parents, after so many days of (inexplicably) not calling. He might show up to surprise his parents on Easter Sunday when they returned from St. Joseph's, might be in the kitchen, eating from the refrigerator.

Or maybe Hector had been injured and was amnesiac, or had been abducted but would escape his captor or be released. Or he had been wandering, drifting, who knew where, hitchhiking; he'd left the university without telling anyone, he was upset, had problems with a girl, a girl he'd never told his parents about, just as he'd never told them much about his personal life since sophomore year of high school, since he put on weight, grew several inches, and became so involved with weight lifting, and then with wrestling, the fanatic weight obsessions of wrestling—fasting, binge eating, fasting, binge eating. And maybe the Phi Epsilons had been putting pressure on Hector; maybe he'd been made to feel inferior among the pledges. He'd once called his mother to say how crappy he felt, never having enough money—the other guys had money, but *he* didn't. He'd told her how shitty he was made to feel, and that if the fraternity dropped him, didn't initiate him with the other pledges, he'd kill himself, he would. He swore he'd kill himself! And Mrs. Campos had pleaded, "Please don't say such terrible things! You don't mean what you're saying, you're breaking my heart."



"Great session, Doc."

Mrs. Campos blamed Mr. Campos for coercing Hector into engineering. Such difficult courses, who could have excelled at such difficult courses? It was no wonder that Hector had been so lonely, away from home for the first time in his life. None of his Southfield High friends were at Grand Rapids. His classes were too large; his professors scarcely knew him. Twelve thousand undergraduates at Grand Rapids. Three hundred residents in Brest Hall, an ugly high-rise where poor Hector shared a room with two other guys—Reb and Steve—who, in Hector's words, never went "out of their way" to be friendly to him.

In turn, Hector's roommates spoke vaguely of him when they were interviewed by Tioga County sheriff's deputies. *Didn't know Scoot too well, he kind of kept to himself, kind of obsessed about things, like the wrestling team last fall. He didn't make it, but the coach encouraged him to try again, so he was hopeful. It was hard to talk to him, y'know? You had to care a lot about Scoot's interests—that's all he wanted to talk about, in kind of a fast, nervous way. He'd be, like, laughing, interrupting himself laughing. Fraternity rush was a crazed time for Scoot. He was really happy when he got a bid from the Phi Eps. He was so proud of his pledge pin, and he was looking forward to living in the frat house next year if his dad O.K.'d it. Because there was some money issue, maybe. Or maybe it was Scoot's grades. He was having kind of a meltdown with Intro Electrical Engineering, also his computer course. He'd ask some of the guys on the floor for help, which was mostly O.K.—you had to feel sorry for him—but then Scoot would get kind of weird, and sarcastic, like we were trying to screw him up, telling him the wrong things. There were times Scoot wouldn't speak to us and stayed away from the room and over at the frat house. Phi Eps are known for their keg parties—they're kind of wild-party guys. There aren't many engineering majors there on the Hill, not in the Phi Ep house, anyway.*

No. 228 Pitt Street is a large, three-story Victorian house with peeling gunmetal-gray paint, moss growing in rain gutters, rotting turrets, and steep shingled roofs in need of repair. The Phi Epsilon house dates back to the early decades of the twentieth century, when the Hill was Grand Rapids's most prestigious residential neighborhood. Now the Hill is known as Fraternity Row, and Phi Epsilon exudes an air that is both derelict and defiant, its enormous metallic-silver "ΦE" above a listing portico. Scrub grass grows in the stunted front yard. Vehicles are parked in the cracked asphalt driveway, in the parking lot at the rear, in the weedy front yard, and at the curb. Often, the Dumpster at the rear of the house overflows and trash lies scattered at its base. It's a feature of the Phi Epsilon house that, warm weather or cold, its windows are likely to be flung open to emit high-decibel rock music, particularly at night; and that, out of the flung-open windows, begrimed and frayed curtains blow in the wind.

Inside the house there's a pervasive

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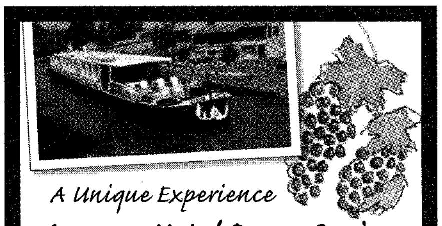

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odor of stale beer, fried foods, and cigarette smoke. The high-ceilinged rooms are sparsely furnished with battered leather sofas and chairs, the decades-old gifts of alums. On the badly scarred hardwood floors are threadbare carpets; on the walls, torn and discolored wallpaper. Brass chandeliers have grown black with tarnish. There are rickety stairs and bannisters, gouged wood panelling, and in the dining room a long table carved with initials like fossil traces. In the basement is the enormous party room running the width of the house, with a stained linoleum floor, more battered leather furniture, leprous-green mold growing on the walls and ceiling, and more intense odors. Scattered throughout the house are filth-splotched lavatories, and in a small room beyond the party room is an ancient, rattling oil furnace.

For several years in the nineteen-nineties, Phi Epsilon fraternity was "suspended" from the university for having violated a number of campus and city ordinances: underage/illegal drinking on the premises, keg parties in the front yard, "operating a public nuisance," sexual assaults against young women and high-school-age girls, and even, during a secret initiation ceremony in 1995, against a Phi Epsilon pledge who had to be rushed to a local emergency room with "rectal hemorrhaging." Bankrupt from fines, lawsuits, and a dwindling membership, the fraternity had gone off campus until, in 1999, a group of aggressive alums, led by a Michigan state legislator, campaigned to have it reinstated. Still, by 2006 the fraternity hadn't yet regained its pre-suspension numbers—it had only twenty-six active members, one-third of whom were on academic probation.

In the rush season when Hector Campos, Jr., became a pledge, the fraternity had needed at least seventeen pledges, but only nine young men accepted bids: Zwaaf, Scherer, Tickler, Tuozzolo, Vreasy, Felbush, Herker, Krampf, and Campos. Of these, only the first three were first choices of the fraternity; the others were accepted to help fill out the membership. None of the pledges knew this, of course. Although, you know how guys are when they're drinking. It might have been, nobody can recall exactly, but it might have been the case that Herker's "big brother," who was pissed off at Scoot Campos for his falling-down-drunk belligerence and his all too frequent assholish behavior, told him that he wasn't anybody's first choice. "Fuck you, fuckhead!" the guys yelled, lurching at each other. Or maybe this never happened, or didn't happen in this way. When interviewed by the Tioga County investigators, none of the guys could remember, exactly. *First we knew Scoot was missing, it's the dean calling. Nobody here knew he was missing. Must've gone back to his dorm and something happened there, or maybe he never went back. But whatever happened to him didn't happen here.*

Mrs. Campos tried to take pride in this fact: Mr. Campos brought his family from Detroit to live in the city of Southfield, in a white, four-bedroom Colonial, and no one in Irene Campos's family had such a beautiful home—not her sisters, not her cousins—and no one in Mr. Campos's family, either. Mr. Campos's mother was living out her life on lower Dequindre, in mostly black Detroit, where for thirty-five years her husband, Cesar, worked for Gratiot Construction & Roofing—he squatted and stooped on roofs in the blazing sun and drove a truck for the company, hauling rubble from construction sites until his back gave out. He died of heart failure at the age of sixty-seven, and Irene Campos was terrified of seeing in her husband's face the defeated look of the old father, resigned always to the worst—that peasant soul, bitter in resignation—dying before his time. *He has given up, he has lost hope that we will see our son again. I will never forgive him.* Mrs. Campos continued to have faith. How many times had she called Hector, Jr.,'s cell phone, knowing that her son's cell phone was no longer in operation, that no one knew where it was. (In the vast Tioga County landfill amid tons of rubble, very likely. Where else? Hector, Jr., kept his cell phone in the back pocket of his jeans, and that part of his clothing had been torn from him.)

Mutations are the key to natural selection, Hector had learned in Intro to Biology, his science-requirement course—said to be the easiest of the science-requirement courses, though he hadn't found it so easy, had barely maintained a C average. *Natural selection is the key to evolution and survival,* he'd written in wavering ballpoint, fighting to keep his eyelids open, so very tired, still wasted from the previous night of hanging out with the guys. He was trying to concentrate, a taste of beer and pizza dough coming up on him even now, hours later. *Genes are the key to change, evolution is only possible through change, species change not by free will but blindly.* No idea what this meant, what the lecturer was saying. If words were balloons, these words were floating up to bounce against the ceiling of the windowless fluorescent-lit lecture hall, colliding with one another and drifting about, stupidly. He would've used his laptop, except his fucking laptop wasn't working right. *No purpose, just chance. The pattern of scout ants seeking food would look to a viewer like "intelligent design" but was really the result of the random, haphazard trails of ants seeking food.* Ants? No idea what the hell this guy's droning on about, like it matters. Jesus, he's so bored! And thirsty for a beer—his throat is parched.

He checks his cell and finds a text message: "PLEASE CALL MOM DARLING." His heart sinks, and with a stab of annoyance he erases the message. *What looks like "intelligent design" is merely random. Instinct, not intelligence. Any questions?* Meant to call his mother, but, Jesus, why doesn't that woman get a life of her own? It's pledge-party weekend. Scoot Campos has other priorities. The girl he'd been planning to take to the party had sent an e-mail: *Something's come up.* Bitch, he knew he couldn't trust her. A girl one of the Phi Ep guys hooked him up with last time said thanks, but she'd be out of town starting Friday. Scoot is damn disappointed, depressed. What's he going to have to do, pay for it?

Kind of earnest and boring when he was, like, sober. You got the impression Campos hadn't a clue how totally uninterested people were in the things he'd talk about—the frat house, wrestling, his opinions on his courses, girls. Me and Steve liked him O.K. at first, it's cool we got a Hispanic roommate, or what's it—Latino?—that's cool. But Campos, he's just some guy, nothing special about him you could pick on, except he wanted to hang out with the frat guys. Thought we were weird for not signing up for rush. After he pledged, he'd start coming back to the room really late, stumbling around drunk like an asshole, mess up in here, piss on the toilet seat and the floor and next day act like it's some goddam joke. That last weekend he didn't come back, truth is it was great. That poor guy, you have to feel sorry for him, but we didn't, much. It's a shitty thing to say, can't tell any adult, but we don't miss Scoot. And we're fed up answering questions about him—we told all we know. Fed up with everybody assuming we were friends of his, involved somehow, or responsible. Fuck it, we are not involved and we're not responsible! And seeing his parents, Mrs. Campos so sad and so pathetic, trying to smile at me, hugging me, and Steve, like we were Scoot's best friends. It's totally weird to realize that a guy like Scoot Campos, so pathetic, a loser, is somebody that is loved by somebody.

At the party, things are going O.K. in spite of the red-haired girl ditching him first chance she has, hooking up with one of the older guys. O.K., Scoot can live with that, but later there's some exchange of words—he's hot-faced, trying not to show he's pissed at the guys taunting him. Then he's laughing to himself, crawling—where? Upstairs, where? He can't think, his head is bombarded with deafening music, so loud you almost can't hear it. Some kind of a joke, eager to make the guys laugh to show that he isn't hurt by, who was it, that girl, blond girl, little-bitty tits, skinny little ass in jeans so tight it's all you can do not to trace the crack of her ass with your forefinger. Maybe, in fact, somebody did just that, and he's cracking up with laughter, braying belly laughter, until somebody slaps him, kicks him, and he's on his knees, on his hands and knees crawling, needing to get to a toilet, and fast. Maybe it isn't funny, or is it? Scoot Campos has fine-honed a reputation at the Phi Ep house as a joker, funniest goddam pledge. The other pledges are losers, but Scoot Campos is a wrestler, he's witty and wired. And good-looking, in that swarthy Hispanic way, with dark wavy hair, a solid jawline, and a fleshy mouth. Funny like somebody on Comedy Central, except Scoot makes it up himself, improvises. A few beers, some tequila, and Scoot isn't tongue-tied and sweating but witty and wired. By coincidence it's New-

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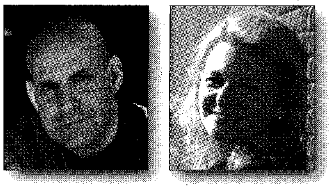

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(RED)

man's Day, the twenty-fourth of the month, named for the actor Paul Newman—Scoot doesn't know why, nobody knows why, and the challenge is to chug twenty-four beers in some record time, and, of course, there's tequila at the party, too. Scoot has acquired a taste for tequila! If he'd known about tequila in fucking high school, he might've had a goddam better time.

Now he's trying to remember what it was, a few weeks ago—some crappy thing one of the brothers did, humiliating, hurt his feelings, right in the middle of midterms. He'd fucked up the engineering exam, he knew, so he was drinking with some of the guys over at the frat house and (somehow) fell down the stairs somewhere. He'd been puking, and sort of passed out, and somebody had dragged him into a bathroom and turned on the shower and left him, and after a while one of the guys came back and turned off the shower, and by this time Scoot had crawled out onto the floor and flopped over onto his back. The guy kicked him—*Hey, Campos. Hey, man, how ya doin'?*—meaning to wake him, maybe, or turn him over, but when Scoot didn't move he left him to sleep off the drunk, soaking wet and shivering in the cold. Next morning when Scoot woke up, groggy and dazed, with a pounding headache, a taste of vomit in his mouth, and dried vomit all down his front, he'd had to admit with the cruel clarity of stone-cold sobriety: They left me here on my back to puke and choke and die, the fuckers. His friends! His fraternity brothers-to-be! And he thought, Never again. Not ever. Meaning he'd de-pledge Phi Ep, and he'd stop drinking. But, somehow, the next weekend he'd come trailing back, couldn't stay away. These guys are his friends, his only friends.

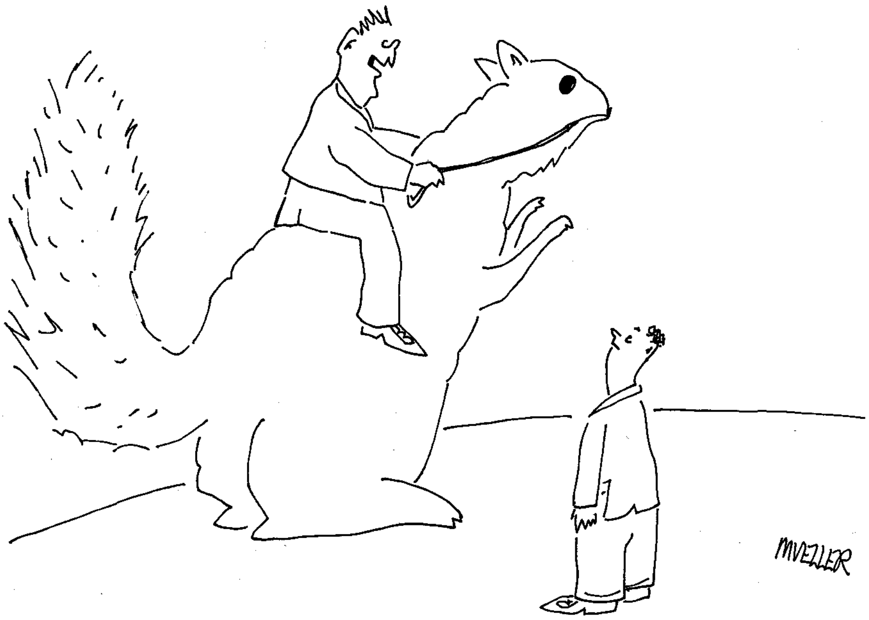
Except tonight there's some kind of bad feeling again, Scoot's feelings are bruised, but, fuck, he isn't going to show it. Of the pledge class, Scoot Campos is possibly the alums' favorite, he's been given to know. *Ethnic diversity—an idea whose time has come for Phi Epsilon.* At the top of the stairs he's out of breath, can't hold it back, God damn, is he pissing his pants? Can't help it, can't stop it. How'd this happen? If the girls downstairs learn of Scoot's accident they'll be totally grossed out, and who can blame them? The guys are going to be disgusted. It's not the first time that Scoot has been too staggering drunk to lurch to a toilet, or outside to the lawn, too confused about where he is, if he's awake or, in fact, asleep. Maybe this is a dream, one of those weird dreams, and it's O.K. to piss, nobody will scold, it's O.K. to piss into some receptacle or crack in the floor, that hot wet sensation spreading in his groin, soaking his underwear and down his legs, quickly turning cold.

A piss trail follows Scoot Campos up the stairs, soaking into the carpet, and he's laughing like a deranged little kid who's wet his diaper on purpose—hell, the carpets at the Phi Ep house are already (piss?) stained, what's the big deal? "Fuck you," he's saying, defending himself against some guy, or guys, stooping over him, calling him names. Scoot Campos is wired tonight, he's laughing in their faces, and somebody's dragging him—where? Toward a window? Through the wide-open windows the curtains are sucked outside and flapping in the rain, and there's a moon, a glaring-white moon like a beacon, some kind of crazy eye peering into Scoot Campos's soul, like, *How ya doin', Scoot? Hey, man, know what? You're O.K.*

This is God's eye, Scoot thinks. (Or maybe a street light? Outside on Pitt Avenue?) Somebody is lifting him, and he's thrashing and flailing his arms, laughing so hard that any remaining dribble of piss leaks out, and whoever it is grabs Scoot in a hammerlock. Probably one of the older guys, one of the wrestlers, built like a tank and taut-jawed and giving off heat and the pungent smell of a male body in fighting mode. He's cursing Scoot, calling him *asshole, dickhead, fuckhead,* and Scoot is being lifted, pushed into an opening in the wall—the trash chute. Or maybe the drunken pledge is crawling head first into the chute of his own volition, and one of the guys grabs his ankles to pull him back, and Scoot is kicking and yelling and laughing. At least it sounds like laughter; with this wild-wired spic anything is possible. *Hey, guys? Help me? Help me, guys?*

He's kicking like crazy, so whoever has hold of his ankles has to let go—Campos is goddam dangerous when he's been drinking—and then his thick, stocky body lurches down the trash chute. It sounds like a pig squealing, or a kid shooting down a slide in an amusement park. At the end of the pitch-black, stale-air chute there should be something soft to break his fall, except there isn't, and with the impact of a hundred and seventy-five pounds Scoot Campos strikes the edge of the trash bin and his forehead hits its sharp metal lip.

Immediately he's bleeding, dazed; his neck has been twisted, his spine, his legs are buckled weirdly beneath him. He's too dazed to be panicked, not knowing



"Where's the nearest walnut station?"

what has happened or where he is. Feebly, he pleads “Hey, guys? Help me?” amid a confusion of rich, ripe, rotting smells, something rancid. He’s upside down trying to turn, to rotate his body, stunned and quivering like a mangled worm, trying to lift his head, to breathe, to open his mouth, a terrible throbbing pain in his neck, in his upper spine. Like a gasping fish he opens his mouth, but he can’t make a sound, can’t call for help. For sure the guys will check on Scoot, make their way downstairs shouting and laughing like hyenas. *Craziest damn thing, this drunk pledge, smashed out of his head, slid down the trash chute.* It’s not the first time a drunken pledge or active at the Phi Ep house has slid down the trash chute into the Dumpster. Anyway, at some point there *was* the intention to check on the pledge in the Dumpster, but amid the party noise, the swarm of people—including heavily made-up high-school girls—and the pounding music there were too many distractions.

Later, it will be claimed that a couple of guys did, in fact, check the Dumpster but Campos wasn’t there. Possibly Campos had been bleeding, but he couldn’t have been seriously hurt because evidently he’d crawled out of the Dumpster and gone away, back to the dorm maybe. Anyway, nobody was in the Dumpster when they checked, they swore. Yet the guy had a weird sense of humor—everybody would testify to Scoot Campos’s weird sense of humor—and he might’ve returned and crawled back into the Dumpster, like a little kid would do, like hide-and-seek, except he’d fallen asleep there, or he’d hurt his head and passed out, and got covered in party trash. Had to be some freak accident like that—what other explanation was there?

As Scoot’s brain is bleeding, as Scoot’s mouth is filling with trash, as Scoot’s heart beats and lurches with a frantic stubbornness, seventy miles to the east, in Whispering Woods Estates, Southfield, Irene Campos lies awake in bed uncomfortably perspiring, hot flushes in her face and in her upper chest. Her thoughts come confused and slow, and have something to do with the moon veiled by curtains, or by high scudding clouds—the full moon is a sign of good luck and happiness, or is there something disquieting about the full moon, so whitely glaring? Or is it a neighbor’s outside light? Mrs. Campos isn’t fully awake, nor is she asleep, and she is planning tomorrow to insist to Mr. Campos that they drive over to Grand Rapids to visit with Hector, Jr., who hasn’t been answering her calls. Beside her, Mr. Campos is sleeping fitfully on his back, twitching and thrashing in the smelly underwear that she’ll sometimes find kicked beneath the bed or in a corner of Mr. Campos’s closet—why? Why would a man hoard soiled underwear? And socks?

Mr. Campos snores, snorts, sounds like a drowning man, and, careful not to wake him, Mrs. Campos pokes and nudges him until he rolls off his back, now grinding his teeth but facing away, at the edge of the bed. Earlier that day, Mrs. Campos sent Hector, Jr., a pleading text message: “PLEASE CALL MOM DARLING.” But Hector, Jr., did not respond, and she has become seriously worried. Oh, if only that college hadn’t been so aggressive about recruiting students from Southfield High, sending brochures and pamphlets, even calling on the phone—not that the university was going to offer Hector, Jr., a scholarship, not a penny, his parents would be paying full tuition. If only Hector, Jr., had decided to go to Eastern Michigan University at Ypsilanti, no more than forty miles away. There’s an engineering school at Ypsilanti, too, and fraternities, and Hector, Jr., could live at home, and Mrs. Campos could take better care of him. Unconsciously caressing her left breast, holding her left breast in her right hand—how like a sac of warm water it is, or warm milk—and, on the brink of a dream of surpassing beauty and tenderness, Mrs. Campos shuts her eyes. Why does Mr. Campos never caress her breasts anymore? Why does Mr. Campos never suck her nipples anymore? Mrs. Campos runs her thumb over the large soft nipple, stirring it to hardness, like a little berry. She is driving back from the city, driving back from ugly Detroit to Whispering Woods Estates, such joy, such pride, turning into the brick-gated subdivision off Southfield Road, making her way floating along Pheasant Pass, Larkspur Drive, Bluebell Lane, and, at last, to Quail Circle, where, in the gleaming-white Colonial at No. 23, the Campos family lives. ◆

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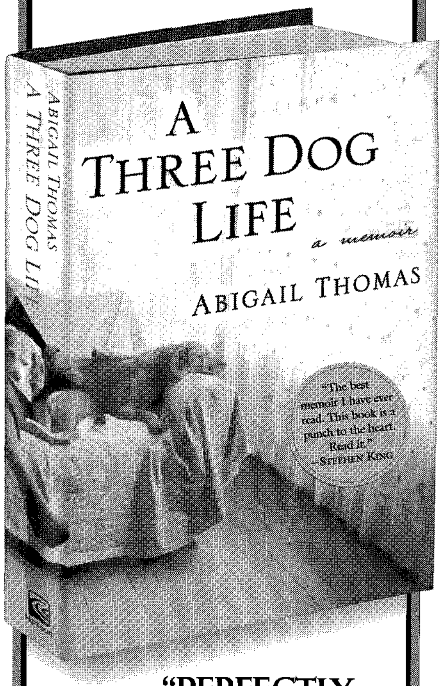
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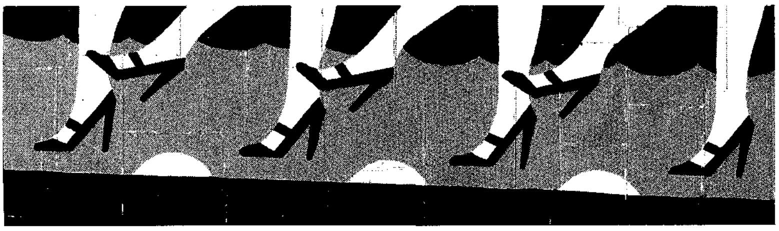

BOOKS

WESTWARD HO!

Revisiting Kit Carson—the man, the myth, and the dime-novel hero.

BY JILL LEPORE

In 1856, when he was forty-six years old and long since a legend, Christopher Houston Carson, better known as Kit, told the story of his life. "I was born on the 24 December 1809 in Madison County, Kentucky," he began. Before he was two, his family moved to Missouri. At fourteen, he was apprenticed to a saddlemaker, but he ran away, joined a caravan heading for Santa Fe, and never looked back. Across the Rockies, up and down the Missouri, from Salt Lake to Sutter's Fort, he trapped beaver, hunted buffalo, traded furs, and mined for copper. He ate roots and elk and, in a pinch, roasted a foal cut from a mare's womb. He was a mountain man. Once a year, he treated himself to coffee, two dollars a pint. He ran from grizzly bears and chased down horse thieves. He killed a great many Indians. He was shot twice, once in a gunfight with thirty Blackfeet, once in a showdown with a drunken Frenchman. In 1843-44 and again in 1845, he guided the explorer John C. Frémont on his gruelling overland expeditions to California and Oregon. During the Mexican War (1846-48), he covered sixteen thousand miles, by mule, delivering messages from the front to President James K. Polk, in Washington, and carrying dispatches back. Afterward, he settled in Taos—for a while, anyway—to raise a family and a flock of sheep with his wife, Josefa Jaramillo; he had married her in 1843, when he was thirty-three and she was fourteen.

In dictating his memoirs, Carson, who was illiterate, left out more than he told. He offered not a word about his two Indian wives: Waa-Nibe, also known as Singing Grass, an Arapaho woman who died around 1839, after the birth of their second daughter; and Making Out Road, a Cheyenne girl, who decided he didn't suit her. Nor did he mention the three children he'd already had with Josefa (they would eventually have five more). Still, his tale must have taken a while to tell. When he was finished, he gave the manuscript to a Taos businessman and ersatz literary agent named Jesse B. Turley. Turley wanted to find someone to write a biography of Carson, based on the memoirs. He thought about tackling it himself, but he soon thought better of it, and instead offered the job to Washington Irving, who declined. Finally, Turley signed an agreement with DeWitt Clinton Peters, a U.S. Army surgeon who knew Carson well. Carson had "dictated the facts"; it remained only for Peters to write the book. Peters, Turley, and Carson would divide the profits. In 1858, a New York publisher brought out Peters's "The Life and Adventures of Kit Carson . . . from Facts Narrated by Himself." Peters boasted that he had written "a book of solid truth."

As solid as butter in Death Valley, that is. The manuscript of Carson's memoirs—rediscovered in Paris in 1905 and now housed at the Newberry Library, in Chicago—is barely a hundred pages; Peters's book is five times as long. Ah, but those four hundred pages of padding! Where Carson explained running away from his apprenticeship with a six-word shrug ("The business did not suit me"), Peters squared his shoulders and roared, "Saddlery is an honorable employment; but saddlery never made a greater mistake than when it strove to hitch to its traces the bold impulse, the wild yearning, the sinewy muscle of Kit Carson." Yee-haw!

Peters reputedly earned twenty thousand dollars from "The Life and Adventures of Kit Carson." Out West, that kind of cash would have bought a lot of coffee, but neither Carson nor Turley ever saw a penny of it. Still, Carson hadn't done it just for the money. He wanted to set the record straight. He soon found out that he had failed. When parts of the book were read to him, he is reported to have said he reckoned that Peters had "laid it on a leetle too thick."

Kit Carson, man of the mountains, man among men, made his literary début in 1845, more than a decade before Peters's biography, in Frémont's wildly popular reports of his expeditions. Frémont painted his intrepid guide as a latter-day Leatherstocking, a Hawkeye who drew "from association with uncultivated nature, not the rudeness and sensualism of the savage, but genuine simplicity and truthfulness of disposition, and generosity, bravery, and single heartedness to a degree rarely found in society." Almost overnight, Carson became both a national hero and a stock character in pulp fiction. In 1849, he turned up in a twenty-five-cent novel published in Boston, Charles Averill's "Kit Carson," in which Carson, who was five feet four, is described as "a man of powerful proportions and Herculean stature." In one scene, the coon-hatted Hercules, the Pride of the Prairie, rescues a young Easterner from marauding Indians by shooting ten "howling savages" with ten shots of his trusty rifle. "Hold my powder horn for me, stranger," Carson shouts, "while I jest pick off a couple of these infarnal varmints, with *Old Sacramento!*"

In his memoirs, the real Carson was at pains to explain that while he had tried to rescue more than a few captives, he wasn't always successful. In New Mexico late in 1849, he trailed Apaches who had attacked a wagon train and captured a settler named Ann White. After enduring three weeks of captivity, White was killed just

Carson, in fictional form, was a mainstay of the hugely popular pulp genre of adventure tales known as "blood-and-thunders."

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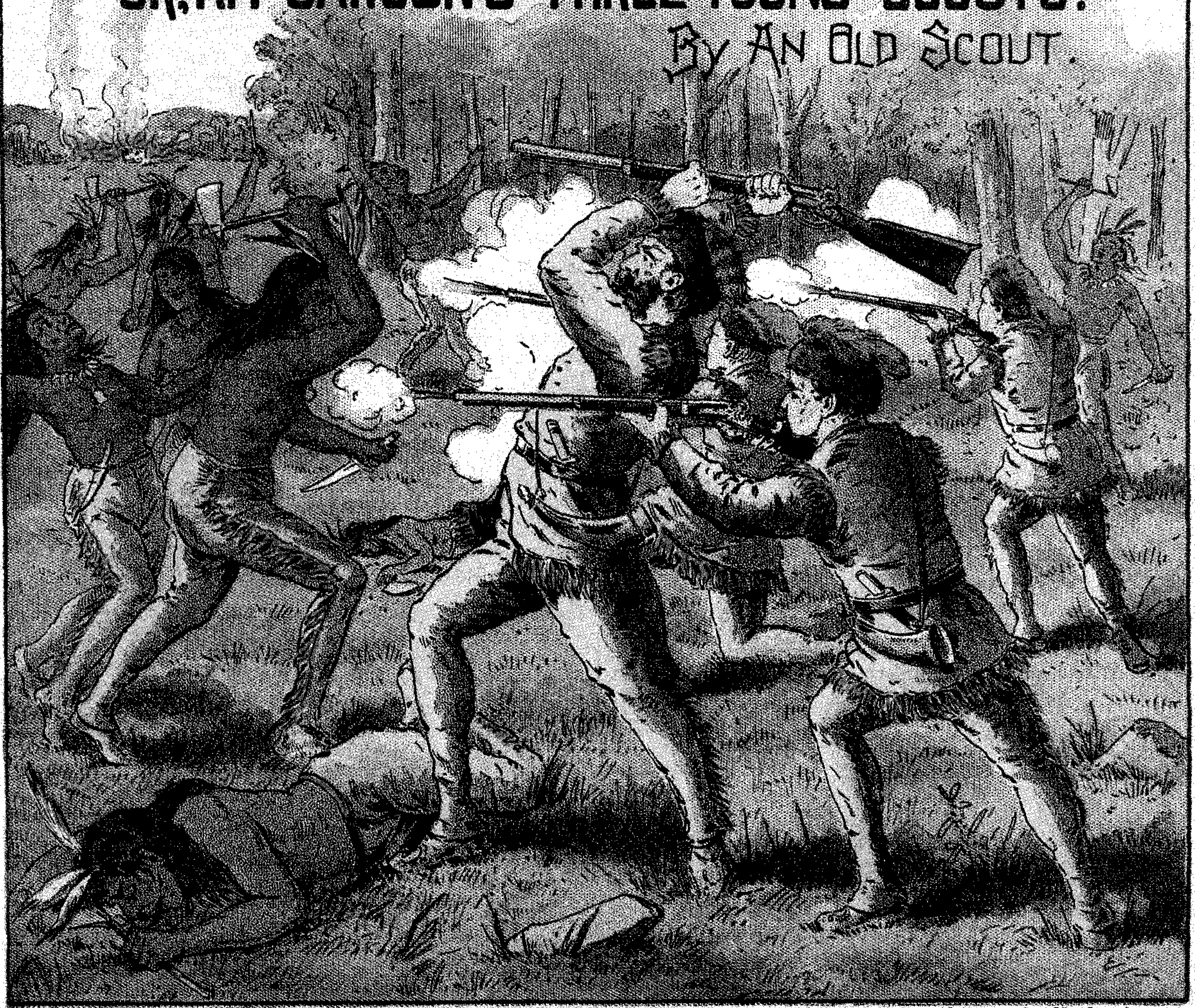
THE BOY RIFLE RANGERS;

OR, KIT CARSON'S THREE YOUNG SCOUTS.

BY AN OLD SCOUT.



"Give it to the red fiends, lads! It's life or death for us now, and think of Bertha, and all the innocent women and children who are in peril!" shouted Kit, while he clubbed his rifle, and rushed, like a human whirlwind, upon the Indians.

moments before Carson and his party reached her. Rummaging through the abandoned Apache camp where White had been prisoner, Carson found a copy of Averill's just published "Kit Carson"; Ann White had carried it with her all the way from Missouri. "The book was the first of its kind I had ever seen, in which I was made a great hero, slaying Indians by the hundred," Carson recalled, ruefully. "I have often thought that as Mrs. White would read the same, and knowing that I lived near, she prayed for my appearance and that she would be saved." She had held out hope for deliverance by a man who never existed. Later, when a friend offered him a gift of Averill's book, Carson said that he would "burn the damn thing."

But this was not to be the last encounter between Kit Carson and his taller, prouder, and deadlier doppelgänger. Beginning in 1860, after a combination of technologies—wood-pulp paper, the steam-powered rotary press, and the stereotype plate—slashed publishers' printing costs, even more outrageous Carson caricatures began appearing in dime novels, books so full of gore and war that they were dubbed "blood-and-thunders." Between 1860 and 1900, Carson made an appearance in more than seventy such stories. In "The Fighting Trapper: Kit Carson to the Rescue" (written in 1874 by a New Jersey schoolteacher named Edward Ellis, using the pen name Captain James Fenimore Cooper Adams), he kills Indians two at a time, a knife in each hand. By dime-novel standards, that counts as restraint. Not long before he died, in 1868, Kit Carson was shown a dime-novel cover featuring a picture of a dashing young Kit "slaying seven Indians with one hand, while he clasped a fainting maiden with the other." As the story goes, the old man stared at it for a while, fiddled with his spectacles a bit, and declared, "That there may have happened, but I ain't got no recollection of it."

It's worth pondering, then, why Hampton Sides's new book about Kit Carson is called "Blood and Thunder: An Epic of the American West" (Doubleday; $26.95). What part of the dime-novel tradition is worth echoing? Much about the book—an ambitious and sprawling account of the winning of the American West, ranging over a century and across a continent—distinguishes it from that tradition. Carson, on horseback, is never far from center stage. But Sides's ambivalent adventurer is a long way from Charles Averill's American Hercules and DeWitt Peters's sinewy swashbuckler. He is less marked by destiny, less self-assured, and more flawed. When writing about young Kit abandoning his apprenticeship, Sides indulges his imagination, but not recklessly. "Sitting miserably at his station with his shears and his awls and his crimping tools," Sides writes, "Kit began to dream of Santa Fe."

Despite the prominence of the life and adventures of Kit Carson in Sides's account, "Blood and Thunder" is decidedly not a biography; Carson doesn't even rate a place in the book's subtitle. After having decorated so many book covers, he is probably better left off: in the last few decades, Carson has been reinvented as one of the era's most notorious villains, the "Columbus of the West," as he is sometimes called, and not by people who mean that as a compliment. The nineteenth-century dime novel's rifle-toting hero has become the late twentieth century's genocidal madman. In 1990, vandals spray-painted swastikas and the word "Nazi" on Carson's grave, in Taos. In 1993, the Kit Carson Historic Museum held a scholarly debate titled "Kit Carson: Indian Fighter or Indian Killer?"

Sides admires Carson. He even has a kind of kinship with him. During the American Revolution, Kit Carson's father served under Wade Hampton, a prodigiously wealthy South Carolina plantation owner. Kit Carson's brother, Hampton Carson, was named after him. Wade Hampton Sides (who used to publish as "W. Hampton Sides" but has since dropped the "W") was named after Hampton's grandson, Wade Hampton III, a Confederate Army cavalry officer. Hampton Sides has that tie to Carson's father's commander, and he has made his peace with it. "Yes, Christopher Carson was a lovable man," Sides writes. "He was also a natural born killer." With that, he deftly dismisses decades of freighted and fruitless debate, having decided, instead, to use Carson as both his story's hero and its villain.

An editor-at-large for *Outside*, Sides,

CLIFFHANGER

In all plays, even "Hamlet," the scenery
is the best part. Battlements, wintry thickets
forcing their edge on you, cough up their promise
as the verse goes starry. You will leave empty-handed,
others will know more than you. Time's aged *frisson*
gets to me more and more, like mice
in a pantomime. And then the prompter
throws up his hands in dismay. You *were* mortal,
so why didn't you say anything? Back to brick basics
for you, my man. We'll see another day
the wave coming up short at water's edge,
which in turn justifies our divagations:
We were *once*, right? Whichever saint calls out
of an awning is ours to succor and molest, else
why harp on the differences between us? Why castigate
what divides or loll on the boundary
that was almost always there?
                                        Infantas
would now intuit better fortunes if all
were copacetic between us, the corona lift its shape
into our ken, less warning than appraisal.
Now even the farthest windows have gone dark. And the dark
wants, needs us. Thank you for calling.

—*John Ashbery*

ho lives in Santa Fe, places his story's tion in a vivid landscape of mesas and eserts, pueblos and canyons. Las Vegas "a hodgepodge of adobe houses, set nong rustling cornfields irrigated by a uddy acequia that seeped from the Gal- nas River." On a march through western rizona and eastern California, Ameri- an soldiers trudged "past mesquite and reosote, through ocotillo and paloverde, cross dunes of rippled sand. They be- eld the splendid weirdness of the cen- ury plant and the joshua tree and en- ountered saguaro cactus for the first ime, the giant of the Sonoran desert, vith its mighty fluted trunks and sagging umanlike arms."

Against this lovingly rendered back- lrop, Sides's Carson leads an ensemble cast of larger-than-life American men, including the U.S. senator Thomas Hart Benton and General Stephen Kearney, commander of Polk's Army of the West. But Sides makes these men yield the stage to Indians—Apache, Kiowa, Hopi, Comanche, Ute, and, most of all, Navajo. Here, too, he lingers over the exquisite, telling detail. Describing Navajo warriors, he writes:

> They wielded clubs and carried shields made of buckskin layers taken from a deer's hip, where the hide is thickest. They had images of serpents painted on the soles of their moccasins to give them a snakelike sneakiness as they approached their quarry. Their steel-tipped arrowheads were daubed with rattlesnake blood and prickly pear pulp mixed with charcoal taken from a tree that had been struck by lightning.

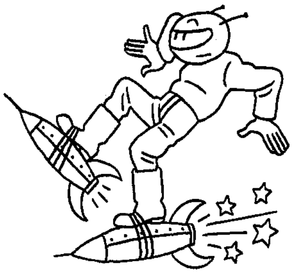
Sides earned considerable acclaim for "Ghost Soldiers," his best-selling, action-packed 2001 book about a heroic Second World War battalion. In "Blood and Thunder," he chronicles American expansion into what is now the Southwestern United States, beginning with the overland travels of men like Carson and Frémont and the brinkmanship leading up to the Mexican War, a gruesome two-year conflict in which nearly fourteen thousand Americans and as many as twenty-five thousand Mexicans were killed. At that war's end, with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in 1848, the U.S. acquired 1.2 million square miles of territory, most of what is now California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Texas, Utah, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming.

The book carries its evocative, sweeping narrative through the eighteen-fifties, largely on the back of Kit Carson's mule, coming and going. Much of this, however, is by way of setup for the story that Sides most wants to tell, and tells well: in 1864, Carson, by then a U.S. Army colonel commanding nearly a thousand men, reduced the Navajo to starvation by burning their crops and killing their livestock. The campaign, intended to force the Navajo to agree to relocate, was both brutal and unrelenting. Carson estimated that his men destroyed nearly two million pounds of food. In the Canyon de Chelly, a Navajo stronghold, Carson's troops burned and chopped down three thousand peach trees. Then they burned the Navajos' baskets and smashed their pots, so that they couldn't carry or store what little food they had left. "If there was ever a grandeur or majesty to warfare, surely none could be found here," Sides writes. In the end, nine thousand Navajos left their land, only to be led on a disastrous three-hundred-mile march known as the Long Walk.

Sides's admirable ambition—and most impressive contribution—is his attempt to tell the whole of this epic story, from the opening of the Santa Fe Trail, in 1821, to the Navajo Long Walk forty-three years later, not just from Carson's vantage but also, and simultaneously, from the point of view of Navajo leaders like the long-lived Narbona and his son-in-law, Manuelito. Born in 1766, Narbona became a famed warrior, fighting the Spanish and later the Mexicans, and leading the Navajo to signal victories. He witnessed the arrival in his land of people he called "the New Men," the Americans. On the eve of the New Men's war with Mexico, in 1846, he shrewdly advocated peace with the well-armed Americans. By then, Narbona was an old man but still, at six feet six, a giant, "with sharp chiseled features and a mane of long white hair." (U.S. Army officers compared his appearance to that of George Washington.) In 1849, during botched treaty negotiations near Chaco Canyon, Narbona was shot to death by American soldiers, and then scalped. A Philadelphia artist and naturalist named Richard Kern, who was there when Narbona died, later regretted that he had failed to secure the Navajo leader's skull for his friend Dr. Samuel Morton, the famous phrenologist. "I think he had the finest head I ever saw on an Indian," Kern wrote.

Sides wants Narbona's skull, too; he wants to be inside it. When Narbona halts a move, Sides writes, it is because "he realized he could not lead his people farther west without angering the gods"; when he meets the Americans, he asks himself, "What fickle spirits drove these men?" It's one thing to want to offer readers real-life characters to serve as foils to Kit Carson; it's another thing to make up interior monologues.

Sides's "Blood and Thunder" will surely capture readers, and it ought to. It's a riveting account of a vast swath of history with which few Americans are familiar. It might also be said that the book's audience already exists: Sides writes in a big-market genre with ties to an even more popular form. The dime-novel Western and the blockbuster military history are two branches of the same family tree. There is quite a lot of bloodshed and a good deal of bluster and stormy weather in "Blood and Thunder": the rolling thunder of horse hooves, the roaring clap of artillery, the lightning flash of gunfire. We even learn about the Navajo belief that thunder is manly: "A female rain was a gentle, steady mist; a male rain was an angry black thunderstorm." But the "blood and thunder" of Sides's title is a pointed reference. Not only does Sides include a brief chapter about the dime novel's depiction of Carson; his book is full of the blood-and-thunder's rhythm and romance and, especially, its gushing relish of violence. (Journey, hardship, backstory, skirmish … gunfight! Scouting, diplomacy, failed diplomacy, kiss the wife … battle!) As a critic in *The Atlantic Monthly* wrote of the dime novel in 1879, you can expect a fresh corpse every two pages: "The whole vast action pivots, as it were, around the muzzle of an extended revolver."



Dime novels first appeared just as the Civil War broke out. Their most avid early readers were soldiers in the Union and Confederate armies. Blood-and-thunders were "sent to the army in the field by cords, like unsawed firewood," one contemporary reported. After the war, dime-novel Westerns cultivated a

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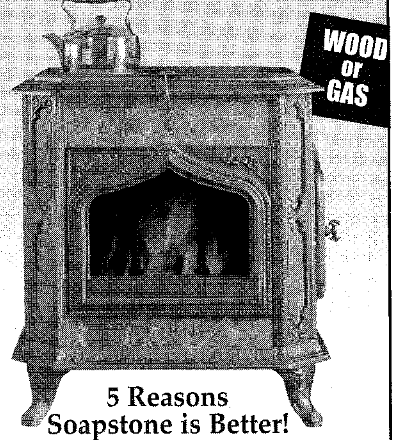

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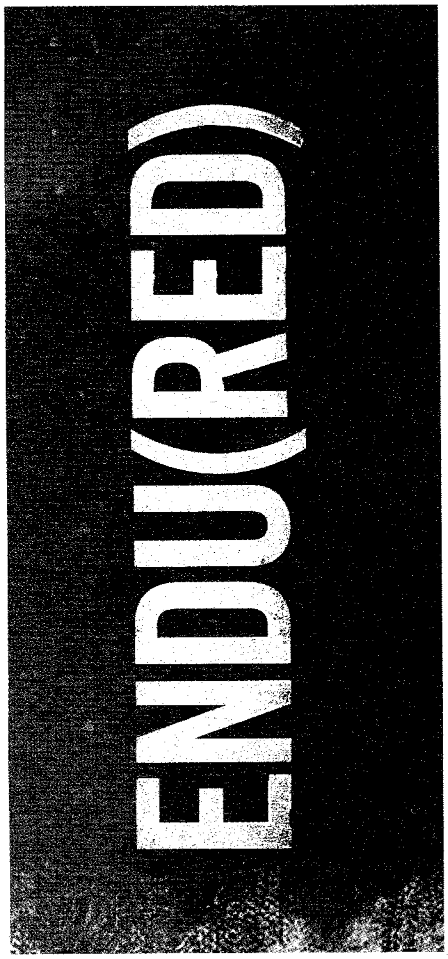


huge, largely Eastern, and altogether male audience: they were the first mass-market fiction sold to men and boys. At a time when unskilled laborers earned as little as six dollars a week, even newsboys could afford them. And there were plenty to choose from. Writers like Edward Ellis, who used more than a dozen pen names, cranked out four titles a year; one author claimed that he could turn out a new story in twenty-four hours. At the Beadle and Adams publishing house, on William Street in New York, dime novels were manufactured on a literary assembly line: writers working on the top floor sent their manuscripts to editors, one floor down, who sent them downstairs to the typesetters, who carried their plates to the basement for printing and shipping. In forty years, Beadle and Adams published more than seven thousand novels. The company's chief distributor had a standing order for sixty thousand copies of every new title. At a standard length of a hundred and twenty-eight pages per title, that's nearly fifty-four billion pages. No wonder one critic called blood-and-thunders "the greatest literary movement, in bulk, of the age."

American intellectuals couldn't stand them—and they couldn't understand them. They despised their violence; they were appalled at their shoddiness. "Why these works are popular is a problem quite as much for the moralist and the student of national character as for the critic," William Everett wrote in the *North American Review* in 1864. Everett chose a sample to read, and could barely slog through them: "Ten of these novels have we faithfully read through, and more up-hill work in the main we never had; and this while Anthony Trollope and Dickens are living, and Thackeray is only just dead."

Sometime in the eighteen-seventies, the plot of dime-novel Westerns changed, radically. As Bill Brown explains in the introduction to his anthology of dime Westerns, "Reading the West," not long after the Navajo Long Walk "white greed replaced Indian savagery as the most familiar source of villainy." Now it was the job of straight shooters like the fictional Carson to protect peace-loving Indians from bloodthirsty, or at least land-hungry, whites. But both before and after this plot reversal, Brown argues, all dime-novel Westerns did the same thing: they unified the North and the South in fiction that "disengaged the story of th West from the story of the nation." Readers, from soldiers to bankers to shop boy could take pleasure in accounts of bloodshed in a place that seemed utterly unconnected to their lives or their politics o their nation.

Sides's book, too, disengages the stor of the West from the story of the nation though with infinitely more subtlety an sophistication. The Mexican War, fo Sides, is finally more about James K. Polk the man, than about manifest destiny, th ideology. Sides bothers to explain tha Polk, as a teen-ager, was probably rendered impotent by excruciatingly painfu and primitive prostate surgery and that, as President, he was "a joyless, childless man fueled by an expansionist agenda." He does not bother to explore how the American expansionist ideology known as manifest destiny appealed to Northerners and Southerners alike; or how the dime-novel Western helped make that expansion appear inevitable and even glorious. Northerners were attracted to manifest destiny's vision of spreading democracy across the continent. Southerners were eager to extend slavery into the western territories, both to buttress their own political power and to open new markets to the domestic slave trade. If the West promised freedom, it also promised slavery. Most of all, it promised civil war. And when the war came, and rent the North and the South apart, the dime novel stitched the two together again, with the fiction that the West didn't matter at all, except as a place where men could be men and Indians would always lose.

None of this has much of a place in Sides's account. His story gallops; more ideas, harder questions, would rein it in to a slow trot. His West, under the Big Sky, is all skittering lizards, Indians on horseback, and mountain men eating pemmican. It is often a sad place, and much of what happens there is shameful, but it is very far away. And we see it, always, through the muzzle of a gun.

Dime novels haunted Kit Carson to the end. On the trail, he once met a man from Arkansas. "I say, stranger, are you Kit Carson?" the man asked. Carson said yes. "Look 'ere," the Arkansan replied, casting his eye over Carson's diminutive frame. "You ain't the kind of Kit Carson I'm looking for." ♦

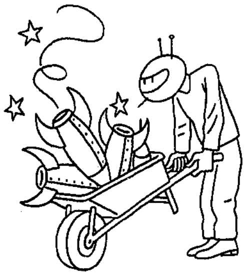
BRIEFLY NOTED

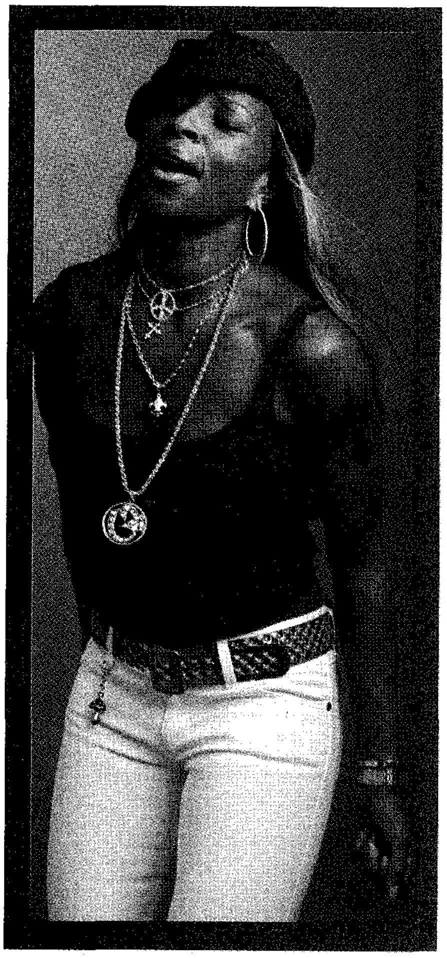
ll Steal You Away, *by Niccolò Amman-i, translated from the Italian by Jona-han Hunt (Canongate; $23).* Ammani-i's previous book, "I'm Not Scared," which was made into a movie, used to memorable effect the point of view of a terrified young boy. This novel centers on Pietro Moroni, a skinny, in-rospective boy in a small village, who s taunted at school and ignored at home. When his favorite teacher, a spinster with problems of her own, lets him down, his anger—at the world, at his loutish parents and his hopeless brother—combusts. The story of the boy and his teacher intersects with that of a local playboy, a ne'er-do-well newly returned to the village, whose gargantuan narcissism cannot ward off a dawning realization of his life's errors. Ammaniti beautifully evokes the lopsided streets of an Italian backwater and, especially in Pietro's surprising friendship with the prettiest girl in the village, the shadow life of childhood.

Golden Country, *by Jennifer Gilmore (Scribner; $25).* Early in Gilmore's high-spirited début novel, Mae West makes a cameo appearance, returning home to Brooklyn and showing off the mirrored ceiling above her bed to her neighbor's rapt six-year-old grandson. History and fiction mingle throughout this family saga, which spans almost half a century, from Prohibition to the age of television, tracing the lives of the children of Jewish immigrants in New York. Desperate to escape the "American shtetl" of Williamsburg, one joins the Mob and elopes with the local beauty; another invents the first two-in-one cleaning product. Gilmore favors broad dramatic strokes: a frustrated actress, wallowing in drink, dismisses the theatre as "homosexual"; a mother bullies her daughter into a nose job that destroys her sense of smell; a former gangster turned Broadway producer placates former colleagues with house seats.

Redemption, *by Nicholas Lemann (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $24).* In July, 1874, A. K. Davis, the black lieutenant governor of Mississippi, wrote to President Grant that "armed bodies of men are parading the streets" of Vicksburg and the authorities are "utterly unable to protect the lives and property of the Citizens"—by which he meant, primarily, black citizens. Vicksburg was the site of Grant's greatest victory; now, Lemann writes, "Vicksburg was, evidently, seceding all over again." Lemann's searing account of how Reconstruction was defeated points to what he calls a campaign of organized terrorism. Thousands of blacks were killed with impunity, as Southern whites gambled that Northerners would be less bothered by atrocities than by the redeployment of federal troops in the South. These Southerners also constructed the myth that they were "redeemers" and that Reconstruction collapsed of its own accord, and not in what was, as Lemann makes clear, a bloody regional fight over the rights of black citizens.

Imperial Life in the Emerald City, *by Rajiv Chandrasekaran (Knopf; $25.95).* This revealing account of the postwar administration of Iraq, by a former Baghdad bureau chief for the Washington *Post*, focusses on life in the Green Zone, the American enclave in central Baghdad. There the Halliburton-run (and Muslim-staffed) cafeteria served pork at every meal—a cultural misstep typical of the Coalition Provisional Authority, which had sidelined old Arab hands in favor of Bush loyalists. Not only did many of them have no previous exposure to the Middle East; more than half had never before applied for a passport. While Baghdad burned, American officials revamped the Iraqi tax code and mounted an anti-smoking campaign. Chandrasekaran's portrait of blinkered idealism is evenhanded, chronicling the disillusionment of conservatives who were sent to a war zone without the resources to achieve lasting change.





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BOOKS

THE MYSTIC WORD

Hart Crane's vision.

BY ADAM KIRSCH

In 1919, the novelist and critic Waldo Frank published "Our America," a manifesto for a new generation of American artists. Surveying the cultural situation of the United States, on the brink of what already looked to be the American century, Frank saw "an untracked wilderness but dimly blazed by the heroic ax of Whitman." Yet a new generation of trailblazers, he thought, was about to emerge from the complacent materialism of postwar America. Writers like Sherwood Anderson and Van Wyck Brooks—along with masters of new genres like Alfred Stieglitz and even Charlie Chaplin—promised not simply to create a modern art but to renew the spirit of the country: "In this infancy of our adventure, America is a mystic Word. We go forth all to seek America. And in the seeking we create her."

"Our America" was an intellectual sensation, going through three editions in its first six months. None of Frank's readers, however, rose more eagerly to his challenge than twenty-year-old Hart Crane, working behind the candy counter of a drugstore in Akron, Ohio. Crane had recently returned home to the Midwest from New York City, where he had ostensibly been studying for admission to Columbia University. In fact, he had spent most of his time cultivating a reputation as a poet in Greenwich Village literary circles, publishing his work in magazines like *The Little Review* (where it appeared alongside the first serialized chapters of "Ulysses"). After three years, a combination of financial pressures and a psychological tug-of-war between his bitterly divorced parents had forced him to leave the city he loved for a menial job in his father's business, the Crane Chocolate Company.

The candy business was slow in Akron, and Crane, with plenty of time to keep up with the latest news from the avant-garde, was primed to receive Frank's modernist call. A few years later, he wrote to Frank, enlisting in his movement of American renewal: "I am certain that a number of us at last have some kind of community of interest. And with this communion will come something better than a mere clique. . . . It is vision, and a vision alone that not only America needs, but the whole world." Frank responded generously, giving Crane steady advice and encouragement through all the tribulations to come. When the first edition of Crane's "Collected Poems" appeared, in 1932, the year of his death, it was Frank who wrote the introduction.

Yet as Frank looked back over the brief life and slender works of his friend and protégé, he had to admit that Crar had not succeeded in becoming the po of the "mystic Word," the creator of th new American myth whom "Our Ame ica" had called for. Instead, Frank be lieved that Crane had been significant i quite another sense, as a great America failure. Crane, he wrote, "began, nake and brave, in a cultural chaos," but hi poetry could only reflect that chaos, no master it.

Crane's naïve sense of his genius is at the core of his appeal.

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Inevitably, the reader of Frank's eleg would have been reminded of more tha Crane's work. Whatever "chaos" migh be found in his poems was even more dramatically evident in his life. Crane had already become one of the emblematic figures of the Lost Generation, thanks both to his conspicuous alcoholism, which was not uncommon in Prohibition America, and to his relatively open homosexuality, which was. After he moved back to New York, in 1923, the rhythm of his life became increasingly erratic. Loathing the occasional job he took as an advertising copywriter, he generally preferred unemployment, keeping afloat with subsidies from his father and loans from friends. Yet, without the tether of a job, Crane was constantly restless: in Manhattan, he missed the peace of the country; upstate, he longed for the excitement of the city. In 1926, he moved to Cuba, where he enjoyed a miraculous burst of productivity, writing much of his long poem "The Bridge" that summer. Then it was Paris, where his heavy drinking got him arrested and thrown in jail. Finally, Crane headed to Mexico on a Guggenheim fellowship, in a last, futile attempt to regain personal and creative equilibrium. On April 27, 1932, on his way back to the United States, he jumped off the deck of the S.S. Orizaba into the waters of the Caribbean.

The interpretation of Crane's life as a dire fable of the age has shaped his reputation ever since. Yvor Winters and Allen Tate, two of his best friends and two of the best critics of modern American poetry, saw his story primarily as a warning. For Winters, he was a noble spirit destroyed by false principles, "a saint of the rong religion"; for Tate, his poetry had ncalculable moral value," but mainly be- use "it reveals our defects in their ex- emity." No wonder Crane remains a ecial case in the canon of American odernism, his reputation never quite as cure as that of Eliot or Stevens. Lang- on Hammer, a professor of English at ale, and one of Crane's most intelligent dvocates, has written that his poetry must be repeatedly 'introduced' again, rought in, reclaimed. . . . Crane still does ot have a place."

At last, however, Crane has been given place, the most unassailable one in merican letters: a volume of his own in he Library of America. "Hart Crane: omplete Poems and Selected Letters," dited by Hammer, can be seen as a con- lusion to the long debate over Crane's stature. Indeed, the book is just the sort of tangible proof of accomplishment that might have vindicated Crane's ambitions in the eyes of his father, C. A. Crane, a hardheaded businessman whose doubts about his son's career were never fully dispelled. "You may live to see the name 'Crane' stand for something where literature is talked about," the poet promised his father in 1924. Surely even C.A. would be content to see that name on the bookshelf alongside those of Whitman and Emerson.

Still, the question of what Hart Crane "stands for" in American literature is difficult to answer. His work resists the complacency of canonization, blazing with qualities that are the opposite of classical: precocity, obscurity, and verbal recklessness. Many twentieth-century poets were heavy drinkers, but Crane was almost unique in preferring to write while he was actually drunk. Malcolm Cowley, in "Exile's Return," his memoir of New York and Paris in the nineteen-twenties, recalled the way Crane would slip away from a bacchanalian party to write verse:

> Gradually he would fall silent, and a little later he disappeared. In lulls that began to interrupt the laughter, now Hart was gone, we would hear a new hubbub through the walls of his room—the phonograph playing a Cuban rumba, the typewriter clacking simultaneously; then the phonograph would run down and the typewriter stop while Hart changed the record, perhaps to a torch song, perhaps to Ravel's "Bolero.". . . An hour later . . . he would appear in the kitchen or on the croquet court, his face brick-red, his eyes burning, his already iron-gray hair bristling straight up from his skull. . . . In his hands would be two or three sheets of typewritten manuscript, with words crossed out and new lines scrawled in. "R-read that," he would say. "Isn't that the grreatest poem ever written?"

Alcohol eventually took a severe toll on Crane's mental and physical health. Winters remembered, "I saw Crane during the Christmas week of 1927, when he was approximately 29 years old; his hair was graying, his skin had the dull red color with reticulated grayish traceries which so often goes with advanced alcoholism, and his ears and knuckles were beginning to look a little like those of a pugilist." But in the beginning, at least, drink helped provoke the visionary mood that Crane describes in "The Wine Menagerie":

> Invariably when wine redeems the sight,
> Narrowing the mustard scansions of the
>   eyes,
> A leopard ranging always in the brow
> Asserts a vision in the slumbering gaze.

Many readers, during his lifetime and since, have had trouble following the associative leaps and subterranean logic of that "vision." When Crane submitted his reverent elegy "At Melville's Tomb"—actually one of his more straightforward poems—to the magazine *Poetry*, the editor, Harriet Monroe, replied, with bewilderment, "Take me for a hard-boiled unimaginative unpoetic reader, and tell me how *dice* can *bequeath an embassy* (or anything else); and how a calyx (*of death's bounty* or anything else) can give back a *scattered chapter, livid hieroglyph;* and how, if it does, such a *portent* can be *wound in corridors* (of shells or anything else). And so on."

The poet's reply, which is included in the Library of America volume, has become a key document of poetic modernism. Crane admitted that he was "more interested in the so-called illogical impingements of the connotations of words on the consciousness . . . than I am interested in the preservation of their logically rigid significations." What Monroe saw as nonsense Crane insisted was a higher kind of sense. He wrote, "The nuances of feeling and observation in a poem may well call for certain liberties which you claim the poet has no right to take. I am simply making the claim that the poet does have that authority."

The only valid test of a poet's authority lies, of course, in the poem itself. And in Crane's best poems linguistic

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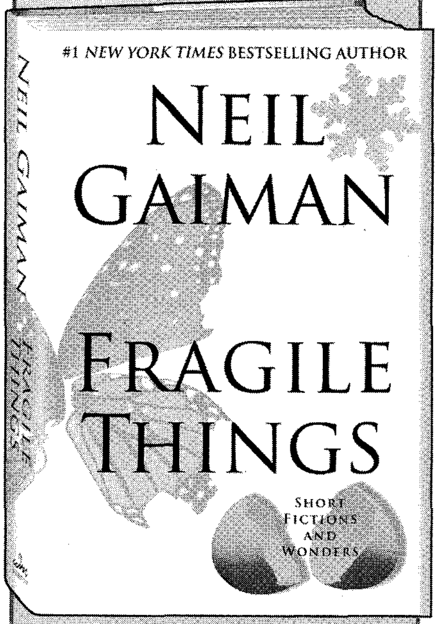
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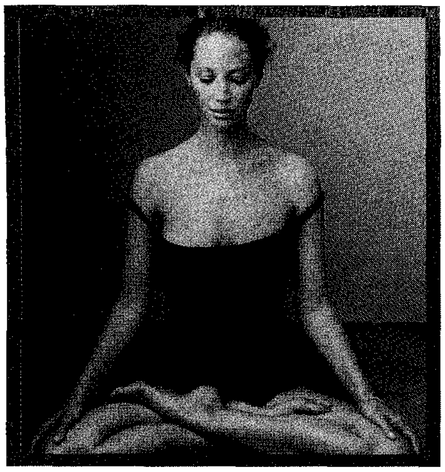

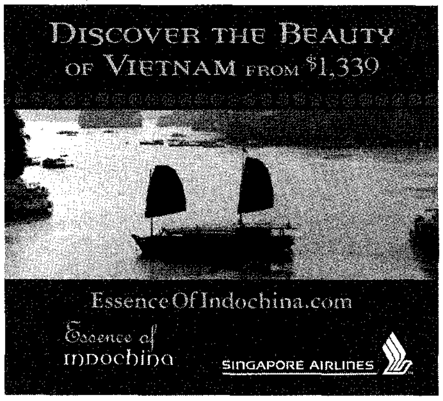

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CAN A TANK TOP CHANGE THE WORLD?

daring allows him to achieve what he called "a sharpening of reality accessible to the poet, to no such degree possible through other mediums." This is the mood of lyrics like "Repose of Rivers" and "The Broken Tower," which create visionary landscapes in the tradition of "Kubla Khan," and of the hymn "To Brooklyn Bridge," the "proem" to his national epic, "The Bridge." Above all, it is the mood of the sequence of six love poems titled "Voyages":

> —And yet this great wink of eternity,
> Of rimless floods, unfettered leewardings,
> Samite sheeted and processioned where
> Her undinal vast belly moonward bends,
> Laughing the wrapt inflections of our
> love.

No poet since Keats had achieved this kind of elated lyricism. In fact, while Crane was a modernist by vocation, he stands more comfortably in the grand tradition of English poetry than most twentieth-century poets do. In an age of free verse, he usually wrote in iambic pentameter and often used rhyme; on the page, his poems look much more conventional than the broken lines of Williams or the somersaults of Cummings. While Crane sometimes sounds like Rimbaud, his work owes less to the French Symbolists—whom he could not read fluently—than to the amplified rhetoric of the Elizabethans, especially Christopher Marlowe. He adored "the glorious cornucopia that Tamburlaine shakes page after page," and his own verse conveys a similar sense of confused abundance.

Yet the unusual composition of the Library of America volume seems a tacit acknowledgment that Crane's value to posterity does not lie strictly in his poetry. Alone among the volumes of modern poets included in the series—Stevens, Frost, and Pound—Crane's supplements his poems with a copious selection of letters. In part, this is simply because he did not write enough poetry to fill a large book. All of Crane's verse, including fragments and juvenilia, comes to no more than a hundred and forty-four pages in the new edition. A selection of his published prose, mainly book reviews of no great importance, fills thirty more pages.

By far the largest part of the book is made up of Crane's letters—four hundred and twelve of them. This is a tribute to the extraordinary appeal of Crane the le ter writer, who, like Crane the poet, i vites comparison to Keats. What mak both men's letters so attractive is t guileless purity of their genius. Whe Keats writes, "I think I shall be among t English poets after my death," his sin plicity exonerates him from any suspicio of bragging; he is merely acknowledgin the possession of powers that exhilarat him as much as his readers. Crane, like wise, presents the rare spectacle of a write who is almost never vain or egotistica but responds to his gifts with a mixture o joy and solemn responsibility. Writing t his father in January, 1917, when he wa just seventeen years old, he ingenuousl announces, "I realize more entirely ever day, that I am preparing for a fine life that I have powers, which, if correctly balanced, will enable me to mount to extraordinary latitudes."

But the letters also draw the reader's attention to what Crane called, in a sadly prescient line in "Passage," "a too well known biography." In addition to the ecstatic lover, the devoted friend, and the brilliant reader of poetry, they remind us of Crane the miserable son, unable to escape from his parents' emotional blackmail; of Crane the mendicant, always asking for loans from rich patrons and poor friends; of Crane the drunk, regaling his correspondents with stories of arrests and brawls. This is surely not how the poet would want to be remembered. He was a committed enough modernist to believe that the work of art stands entirely apart from its creator: "I would like to establish [the poem] as free from my own personality," he wrote. By insisting that Crane's biography is central to an understanding of his achievement, the Library of America volume ironically reinforces the verdict of his harshest critics.

For readers like Tate and Winters, Crane's suicide was the inevitable, artistically fitting conclusion to a deeply disordered life, and the chief symptom of that disorder was his homosexuality. In Tate's major essay on Crane's poetry, what was ostensibly literary criticism now appears as Freud-era homophobic code: Tate speaks of Crane's "failure to impose his will upon experience," his "locked-in sensibility [and] insulated egoism." Winters, still more explicit, regards Crane's sexuality as comparable his alcoholism, a "weakness" that he ultivated on principle."

To read these critics on Crane is to mpathize all the more deeply with a et who had to negotiate the prejudices his closest friends as well as those of ciety at large. "O God that I should ave to live within these American rerictions forever, where one cannot whiser a word, nor at least exchange a few ords!" Crane complained in 1923, after aking eye contact with a man at a conert. It was the kind of tentative encouner that appears several times in his poems, s in "For the Marriage of Faustus and elen":

> Then I might find your eyes across an aisle,
> Still flickering with those prefigurations. . . .
> There is some way, I think, to touch
> Those hands of yours that count the nights
> Stippled with pink and green advertisements.

Only with Emil Opffer, the lover who inspired the "Voyages" sequence, did Crane seem to find a joyful intimacy. "I have seen the Word made Flesh," he told Frank after meeting Opffer, in 1924. "I mean nothing less, and I know now that there is such a thing as indestructibility."

Today, the homophobia that disfigured contemporary reactions to Crane is easily recognized for what it is. Yet Crane's achievements, which place him in the second rank of modernists, still do not seem commensurate with his gifts, which were as great as any American poet's. As Waldo Frank suggested, Crane's failure to write more perfect and more substantial works does suggest something about his country and his age, which could not give his imagination the nourishment it needed.

The key evidence here is "The Bridge," the long poem that Crane worked on from 1923 to 1929, about half of his adult life. Crane intended "The Bridge" as his masterpiece. Just as important, it was to be his rebuttal to "The Waste Land," which appeared in 1922, and whose utterly convincing portrait of modern civilization in fragments seemed to put paid to the dream that the new art could regenerate American society. On many American poets, its effect was to confirm them in a cultural pessimism that sought antidotes in order, discipline, and tradition.

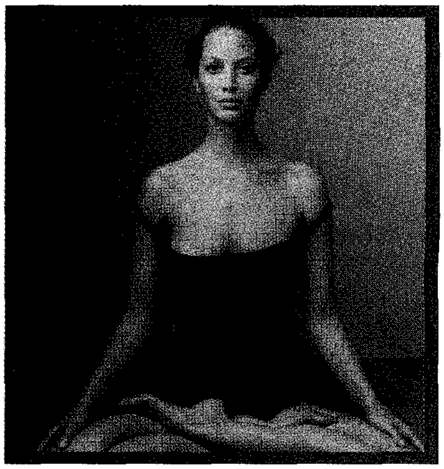
Crane never disputed Eliot's genius or accomplishment; he only wanted to resist his influence. "It is such a fearful temptation to imitate him that at times I have been almost distracted," Crane wrote to Tate. But he felt called to challenge what he saw as Eliot's suffocating negativity, and hoped to "apply as much of [Eliot's] erudition and technique as I can absorb and assemble toward a more positive, or (if [one] must put it so in a sceptical age) ecstatic goal. I should not think of this if a kind of rhythm and ecstasy were not (at odd moments, and rare!) a very real thing to me."

"The Bridge" was meant to show that "ecstasy" was as valid for the modern poet as despair. "If I do succeed, such a waving of banners, such ascent of towers, such dancing etc., will never have been put down on paper!" he wrote in 1923, just after conceiving of the project. If Eliot wrote about alienation, Crane's governing metaphor would insist on the possibility of connection. "The very idea of a bridge, of course, is a form peculiarly dependent on . . . spiritual convictions," he wrote to Waldo Frank in 1926. "It is an act of faith besides being a communication." He even bragged, childishly, that "The Bridge is already longer than the Waste Land,—and it's only about half done."

Reading "The Bridge" today, however, one cannot help but agree with the verdict of its first critics—that it is an impressive failure. At moments, it does capture what Crane called the "feelings of elation . . . like being carried forward and upward simultaneously . . . that one experiences in walking across my beloved Brooklyn Bridge." But it varies wildly in quality, containing some of Crane's best writing and some of his worst. His neo-Elizabethan style was never more exhilarating than in his famous description of the Brooklyn Bridge, in the concluding section, "Atlantis":

> O Thou steeled Cognizance whose leap commits
> The agile precincts of the lark's return;
> Within whose lariat sweep encinctured sing
> In single chrysalis the many twain.

Yet the poem also has long stretches of windy narrative about American history, focussed on bleached, school-pageant figures like Columbus, Pocahontas, and the Wright Brothers. Often, Crane's rhetoric seems to be running on autopilot, and he can be rankly senti-



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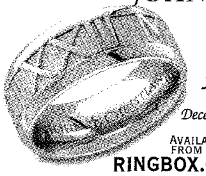

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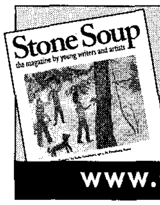

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mental, as in his description of a prair mother in the "Indiana" section.

More fundamentally, "The Bridg was doomed by the self-consciousne with which Crane went about creating new American myth. For Crane, as f contemporaries like Joseph Stella an Walker Evans (whose photographs illustrated the first edition of the poem), th Brooklyn Bridge was the perfect subje for the modern American artist—a utilitarian cathedral, whose majestic for emerges spontaneously from its mechanical function. Yet the sheer insistence o his addresses to the Bridge—the mos characteristic word in the poem, and on of the most frequent, is "O"—reveal strain. Once a poet calls his myth a myth he prevents the reader from treating it a a reality; we use the word "myth" only fo stories we ourselves cannot believe. Tha is why a poet cannot create myths; he can only employ and embellish the ones he has inherited. Homer could not have invented the Olympian gods, or Dante the cosmology of medieval Catholicism, and still have written as he did. By striving so effortfully to turn the Brooklyn Bridge into a religious symbol, Crane forces us to recognize that all he has really created is a vague and problematic metaphor. This failure means that "The Bridge" ends up illustrating, by a bitter irony, the central insight of "The Waste Land": that traditional forms of belief are unavailable in the modern world.

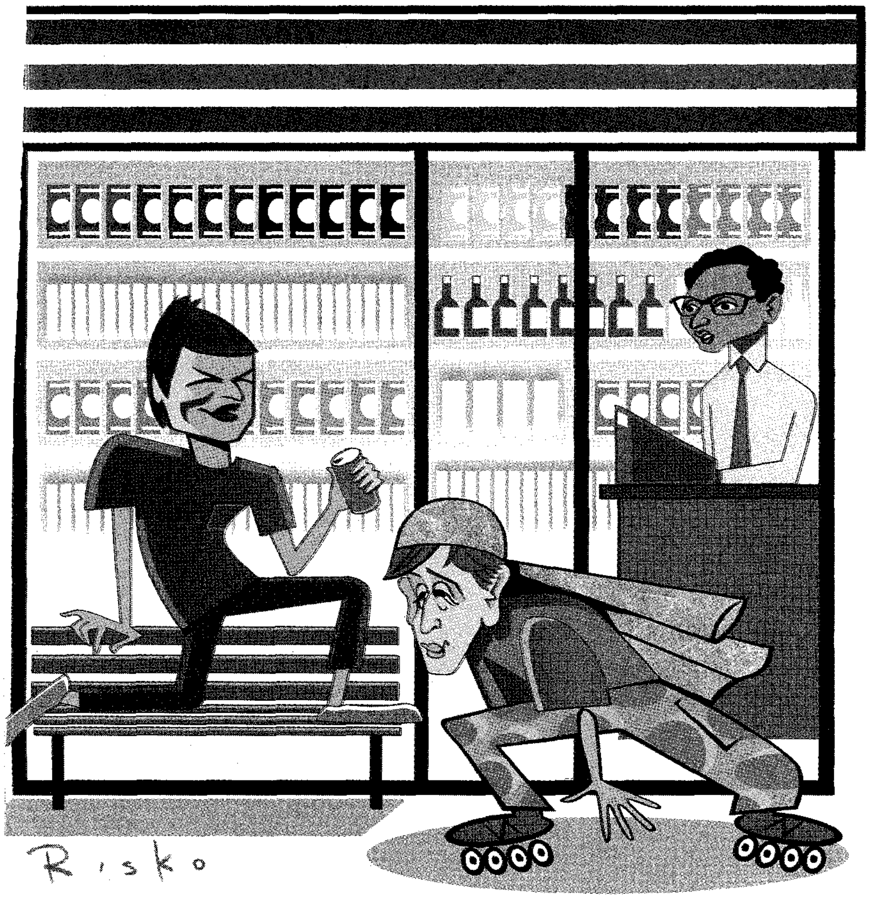
In his urgency to justify himself and his country by producing a national epic, one might say, Crane misplaced the very quality of his work that makes it essentially American—namely, his spontaneous trust that his perceptions and experiences are as significant and authentic as anything myth or history can provide. Like Emerson and Whitman, he is certain that every great poet represents a new beginning. "I must always write from the standpoint of Adam," he insisted. In a period obsessed with its belatedness, Crane simply refused to accept that the modern world was diminished or disenchanted, and his poetry, at its best, uses language strangely and vitally enough to vindicate its claim to ecstasy. This is the promise that survives the legend of Crane's life and death, and even the flaws of his work, and impels us say of him what he said of Melville: "How much that man makes you love him!" ◆

THE THEATRE

THE LOST BOYS

Eric Bogosian revives the suburban ennui of the nineties.

BY HILTON ALS



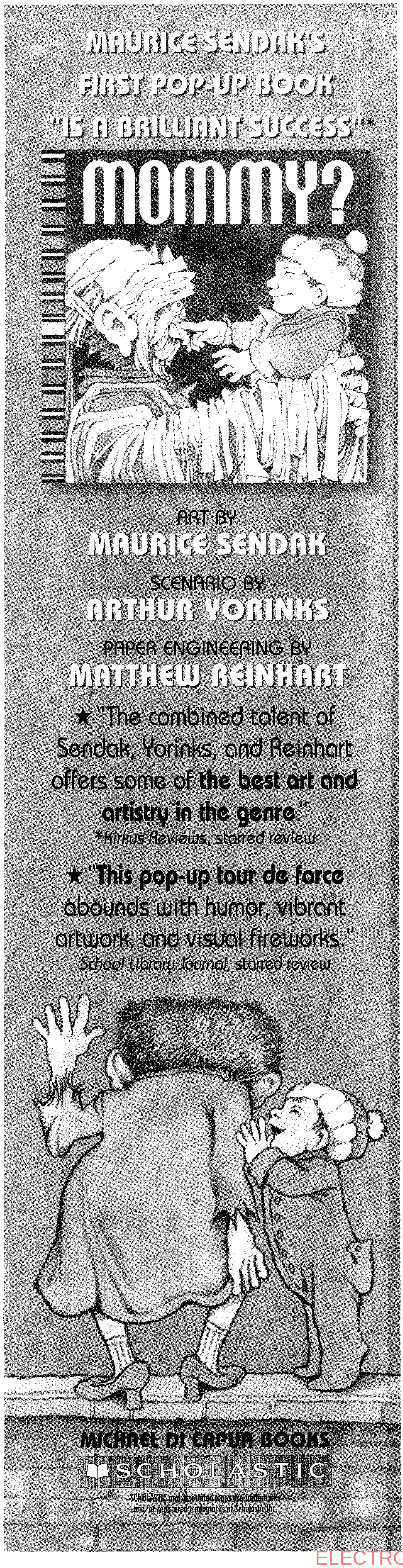
Peter Scanavino and Kieran Culkin as the disaffected youths of "subUrbia."

Resentment is scrawled like graffiti across the faces of the major characters in Eric Bogosian's 1994 play "subUrbia" (now in revival, in an updated version, at the Second Stage). Blowing around the stage like ragged refuse, the three boys who instigate much of the play's action have all-American names that suit their junk-food-filled days and porn-obsessed nights: Buff (the exceptional Kieran Culkin), Tim (Peter Scanavino), and Jeff (Daniel Eric Gold). This gang of post-high-school boys from small-town U.S.A., with their worn-down tennis shoes, dirty jeans, and stained T-shirts, are going nowhere fast—leaving tire marks on the backs of those who show them any love at all.

We've seen this type before. Their most famous predecessors hung out at Doc's drugstore, on the white side of the racial divide, in "West Side Story" (1957). Seven years later, Amiri Baraka, then known as LeRoi Jones, told some of their secret stories, with lyrical ferocity, in his one-act play "The Toilet." Some thirty years on, in Bogosian's play, these early Johnny Knoxvilles pick up where the "Spur Posse" of Lakewood, California, left off: they want to nail chicks and score points, sure, but their testosterone-doped minds are just as interested in harassing immigrants and downing the booze, pizza, and greasy Chinese takeout that invariably make one of them sick. Sporting the uniforms of discontent, slapping one another on the head—is this the only way for young white working-class men to express friendship? Their creator seems to think so.

Bogosian established his niche as a monologuist soon after his arrival on New York's downtown theatre scene, in 1976. (He was born of Armenian parentage, in Woburn, Massachusetts, in 1953.) With his deep, husky voice, his large green eyes, and his dark mop of unkempt hair, Bogosian was one of the first working-class lugs to declare himself an artist in the androgynous age of Devo. A kind of federally funded Bruce Springsteen (he received two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts), he produced a series of angry performance pieces—from "Men Inside" (1982) to "Pounding Nails in the Floor with My Forehead" (1994)—that distinguished him from the relatively effete, intellectual monologuist Spalding Gray, as well as from Karen Finley and her physical, feminist work. Bogosian ranted in defense not of his own world view as an artist, or of a traditional underclass, but of the maligned and often ignored plebs in flannel shirts; he set about bringing men back from Mars. In his short monologue "The Fan," from "Pounding Nails," a male admirer goes from joy to bitterness as the object of his obsession tries to get rid of him. And in "Superman!," a sketch from "Men Inside," a little boy intones, "Hey Dad, guess what I did today? I ran as fast as I could and I threw a rock at a bird and I killed it! Pretty good, huh Dad? Hey Dad, when I grow up I'm gonna be just like you, huh Dad? I'm gonna be tall and strong and never make any mistakes and drink beer and shave and drive a car and get a check. I'm gonna be just like you, huh Dad?" While telling these distinctly male stories, Bogosian was careful to maintain a whiff of irony, so as not to alienate his audience with too much machismo.

As directed by the able Jo Bonney (who is married to Bogosian), "subUrbia" demands a great deal of energy from its cast. Perhaps the play's nonstop action is meant to compensate for its lack of dramatic variety: shit happens, but it happens over and over. Hanging out in front of a 7-Eleven-type convenience store, Tim drinks a six-pack. Buff talks about banging chicks. Jeff is going out with Sooze (the great Gaby Hoffmann), who is best friends



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with the bespectacled, fragile Bee-Bee (Halley Feiffer), who just got out of rehab. Sooze wants to be an artist. She does performance pieces about men being dicks ("Fuck the President. Fuck the Vice-President. Fuck the Secretary of De-fense. Fuck the Secretary of *Offense*. Fuck the Pope. Fuck my dad"). By including Sooze and Bee-Bee in this male-dominated story, Bogosian is, of course, winking at the audience. The girls' self-awareness is a perfect counterpoint to their male companions' lack of awareness of anything at all. The men grudgingly applaud Sooze's efforts ("Is that supposed to be about me?" Jeff asks). But she doesn't capture their attention: they'd rather listen to Tim making derogatory remarks about the convenience store's Pakistani owners, who are desperate for a little peace—let alone a little commerce.

Time passes in this way until an old friend, Pony (Michael Esper), briefly returns to the fold. Once content to be a lout, Pony has moved on to become a burgeoning rock star. Accompanied by Erica (the excellent Jessica Capshaw), his publicist from Bel Air, Pony tries to share his success with his friends, who will have none of it: accepting Pony and his limo would mean letting go of their resentment of him for having left and made something of himself. Sooze still seems to have a thing for Pony, but she also seems to have a thing for the boys who try to hold her back. Where would she be without their resistance? To be with Pony, to become a woman and an artist, she'd have to take some risks, and she's as stunted as her boyfriend, Jeff.

To this relatively uninteresting dilemma, which is never resolved, Bogosian adds a possible murder: Jeff believes that Tim, after a drunken dalliance with Erica, has killed her. But this is little more than a dramatic device. Erica has simply gone off with another member of the gang, thus proving the age-old adage that all any upper-class chick needs is to be brought back down to earth via a good, untutored lay. The problem is no sooner solved than Bogosian rushes in with a suicide, a kind of halfhearted coda to the proceedings, which, in the end, are little more than a series of set pieces punctuated by profanity.

When the play was first produced,
"Reality Bites," Ben Stiller's movie ab
the disaffected youth of Houston, w
modest hit, outstripped in its freak
out adolescent mythology (and nos
gia) by Richard Linklater's 1993
"Dazed and Confused." (Linklater l
directed "subUrbia" for the screen.
was chic, on the stages and screen
the early nineties, to throw young ad
into the American cultural—and t
moral—wasteland and see what h
pened. That little *did* happen was
of the story: the common assumpt
was that the youth of the day were
dazed or confused to develop their o
narratives. Bogosian, like many otl
writers tackling this subject matter b
then, was so busy indicting the Zeitg
of suburbia that he forgot to attacl
credible story to it.

As Tim, the most troubled memb
of the tribe, who has just returned fro
a stint in the Navy, however, Scanavi
gives a performance that transcends t
limitations of the script. (He brough
similar stellar quality to his small pa
as a poor hustler in Conor McPhe
son's "Shining City.") A puffy-eyed a
coholic, Scanavino's Tim oddly resen
bles Julie Harris as the sensitive tomb
Frankie Addams, in the 1952 film ve
sion of Carson McCullers's "The Men
ber of the Wedding." You can feel h
panic surge as the sun goes down; n
street light shining through the foliag
can illuminate his pain. Tim uses booz
to give him the courage he needs to b
an asshole, but his sensitivity keep
breaking through. His lithe body i
twisted in an imitation of what it mean
to be a man. Itching for a fight, he's re
ally just looking for a way out. When
ever he climbs up to the roof of the con
venience store to get a better view o
the world, one fears for him. Will h
jump?

Theatrical fashions, like all fashions
change, and Neil LaBute has replace
Bogosian as the go-to guy for vision
of the depraved male. Exhuming "sub-
Urbia" (and trying to update it to a nev
decade) feels like an attempt, on Bogosian and Bonney's part, to reclaim the
territory that LaBute has populated sc
aggressively. But Bogosian can't compete with his successor, nor should he
try to. Doing so only lessens the value of
his own work, which, in its time, had a
charm and a purpose. ♦

METAMORPHOSIS

"Butterfly" at the Met.

BY ALEX ROSS

t the bottom of one of the Metropolitan Opera's winding staircases, can find a medium-sized wall plaque honor of the arts patron Otto H. hn, who, decades ago, tried to change s grandest of opera houses into a more dern place. Once ubiquitous and now stly forgotten, Kahn brought the Bal- s Russes to America, backed modern- poetry in *The Little Review*, showed in Cole Porter lyrics, and inspired as- cts of "Citizen Kane." He long served the chairman of the Met board, and ver tired of offering up new ideas for e company's future. He hoped to build new theatre on a site below Colum- s Circle, and had Joseph Urban draw plans for a Bayreuth-style amphithe- re where even the cheapest seats would ave good views. He spoke of commis- oning provocative modern works and f attracting new audiences through ed- cation programs, radio broadcasts, and utdoor concerts. A pop-music enthusi- st, he invited Jerome Kern and George ershwin to write jazz-themed op- ras for the house. Inevitably, the old- noney families on the Met board in- ured that most of these plans came to aught. Urban's theatre was never built. ern and Gershwin did write their jazz rand operas—"Show Boat" and "Porgy nd Bess"—but they played on Broad- vay. Sundry new works came and went, enerally unwanted.

This summer, Peter Gelb took over rom Joseph Volpe as the general man- ger of the Met, and the spirit of Otto Kahn is moving in the air. For time out f mind, the Met has been a stately and secretive place, impenetrable yet strangely predictable, where stars have sung in plush productions of standard operas to the accompaniment of minimum publicity. Gelb transformed the company's public façade in a matter of weeks. Live broadcasts have started up on satellite radio, and digital relays are planned for movie theatres around the country. Slick posters have appeared on the subways. Witty banter is showing up in the program books and on the Web site. The opening-night gala, traditionally the preserve of high society, could be viewed on jumbo screens in Lincoln Center Plaza and in Times Square, replete with a red-carpet spectacle involving Sean Connery, Susan Sarandon, Lou Reed, David Bowie, and an "Entertainment Tonight"-style interviewer. At the center of the hoopla was a sumptuous production of "Madama Butterfly," by the film director Anthony Minghella. Among veteran operagoers, there was a certain amount of head-shaking, but everyone knew why this was happening. Met attendance has been declining, the result of a post-9/11 slump, an aging audience, and deep-seated institutional complacency.

The director Anthony Minghella replaces Cio-Cio-San's child with a Bunraku puppet.

Gelb's metamorphosis of the Met is a fascinating sleight of hand, because nothing new is happening onstage. Minghella's "Butterfly" was Gelb's only addition to the season that Volpe had already planned, and it originated last fall at the English National Opera. What we are witnessing is a virtuoso repackaging. The consequences of Gelb's future plans—he has announced collaborations with new directors, several commissions of new operas, ventures into music theatre—won't be known until 2009 or 2010. There are reasons to be skeptical. Celebrity worship will get the Met only so far; people aren't going to pay premium prices to sit near Jude Law, stimulating as that experience may be. Even if Gelb's ideas are uniformly brilliant, they may draw fire from conservatives, who, these days, tend to be found not only on the governing board, as in Kahn's time, but in the unions. Yet the speed with which Gelb has accomplished his early goals is impressive. The old behemoth is suddenly shrugging off dated rituals, throwing to-

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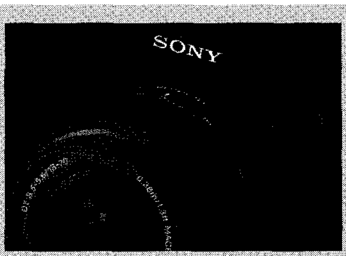

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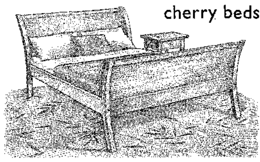

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gether complex deals with the unions and the media, flying by night in high style. For the duration of the gala, there was no more fabulous place on earth, which is as it should be.

Minghella's "Butterfly" bodes well for the progress of Gelb's taste. It offers several of the most piercingly beautiful images I've seen in an opera house. Brilliantly costumed women rise in a long line at the back of the stage, their peacock colors shining against a turquoise sky, their figures reflected in the lacquer floor and on panels above. A dozen white paper lanterns hover in the dark, their mirror images floating like many moons. Immense curtains of flower petals descend as the pure-hearted Cio-Cio-San and the cynical Pinkerton embrace. At the end, when Cio-Cio-San chooses suicide over shame, a huge swath of blood-red fabric unfurls diagonally across the stage. Film directors don't always make good opera directors; what I've seen of Werner Herzog's productions lacks the visual power of "Aguirre, the Wrath of God" and "Fitzcarraldo," and even Andrei Tarkovsky's ominous "Boris Godunov" paled next to "Andrei Rublev." Minghella wisely sets aside the idea of approximating cinematic sprawl onstage; he listens for each structural shift in the score and finds a simple, self-sufficient illustration of it. Credit should go to the associate director and choreographer, Carolyn Choa (who is Minghella's wife); the costume designer Han Feng, who achieves saturation without excess; the set designer Michael Levine, who banishes period clutter; and the lighting designer Peter Mumford, who makes everything glow from within.

Minghella directs the action with uncommon care, steering clear of the big-budget theatrical amateurism that has reigned for too long at the Met. Gone is all that creaky, cutesy stage business—the half-hearted frolicking and flag-waving by the chorus, the scamperings of kids, the *Aah*-inducing piles of carpentry. (If you miss the old-school approach, you can see the Met's charmingly decrepit, forty-year-old staging of Ponchielli's "La Gioconda," which has been dug out of storage to serve as a vehicle for the diva stylings of Olga Borodina and Violeta Urmana.) Minghella excises the sentimentality from "Butterfly," and his most drastic measure is to replace Cio-Cio-San and Pinkert
child with a Bunraku puppet, whose j
ing movements and plaintive mask p
the story in a more symbolic direct
The puppet required a mental readj
ment every time it appeared, and perh
should have been used more econo
cally. The tension slackened for muc
Act II, but the finale was devastating.

Cristina Gallardo-Domâs, who s
Cio-Cio-San, had a bumpy start, sou
ing tentative in attack, thin in vocal s
port, and wobbly in pitch. Perhaps
had an attack of nervousness—w
wouldn't, in front of Jude? Her pr
lems continued in the set piece "Un
dì," which was more survived than m
tered. Still, she made a forceful impr
sion, her body trembling in Kabuki st
and her voice slicing through the orch
tra with affecting urgency. She was n
born to sing this repertory, but she p
her stamp on it. Marcello Giordani, w
has been moving methodically to t
front of the thin ranks of Italian teno
gave a strong performance as Pinkerto
his slightly forced but penetrating voi
following the contours of Puccini's mus
cal prose with inborn grace. As an act
he was especially good in his exchang
with Dwayne Croft's Sharpless; he ca
tured the thoughtlessness of the Qui
American, while Croft, restrained and e
oquent, registered the audience's uneas
Maria Zifchak made for an unusually pa
sionate Suzuki. All the singers could hav
used more vocal heft; the orchestra an
the images drove the evening.

Puccini wrote "Butterfly" with th
scores of Wagner's "Tristan und Isolde
and Debussy's "Pelléas et Mélisande" clos
at hand. James Levine, conducting th
Met Orchestra, underlined Puccini's debt
to his great predecessors: each act unfolded in a brooding trance, with mysterious eddies of sound along the way. In another context, Levine's approach migh
have seemed heavy-footed, but here i
achieved a mesmerizing counterpoint wit
Minghella's weightless tableaux. As th
curtain descended during the final bars
the crowd began to erupt in applause, bu
Levine and the orchestra held back the inevitable triumph with a furious enunciation of the cognitively dissonant G-majo
chord with which the score ends. Wheeling from celebrity ballyhoo to ritual tragedy, Peter Gelb's Met is staying admirably faithful to opera's demented heart. ♦

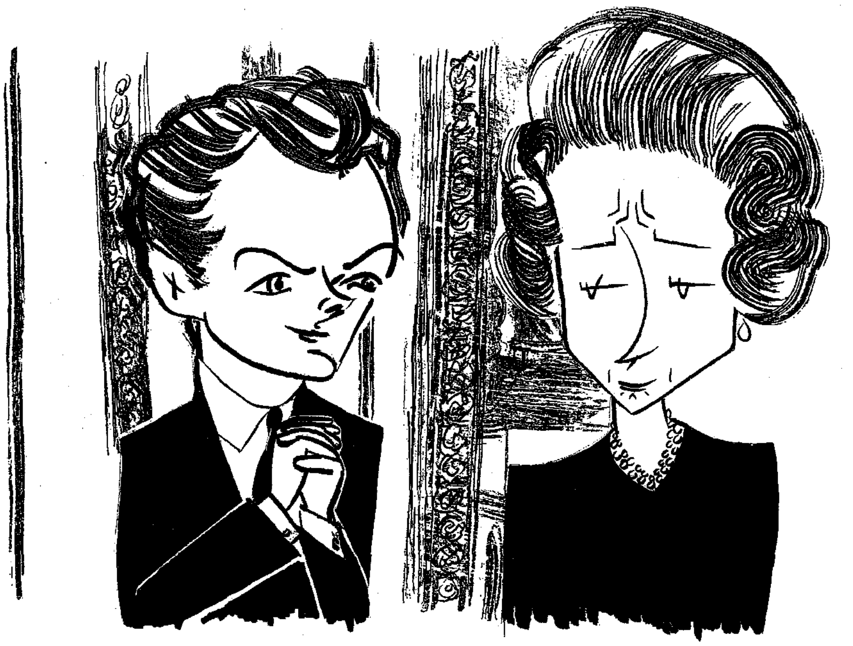
THE CURRENT CINEMA

BATTLE ROYAL

Stephen Frears's "The Queen."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The new Stephen Frears film, "The Queen," is about a clash of wills be- een Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II d the Right Honourable Tony Blair, .P., Prime Minister in Her Majesty's overnment. Or, if you prefer, Alien vs. redator. The clash dates from 1997— st from May, when Blair came to wer (a power that he enjoys, or at least wields, to this day), and then from August, when the Princess of Wales died in a car crash and the British people, much to the consternation of their sovereign, behaved in ways that she did not recognize as British. You could argue that to dramatize such events is premature to the point of tastelessness, yet "United 93" and "World Trade Center" have turned their gaze upon a closer and greater calamity, and, to be fair, the era in which the arrival of the Blair administration was greeted as a fresh dawn, bedewing a hopeful electorate, now seems about as recent, and as realistic, as Atlantis.



Michael Sheen as Tony Blair and Helen Mirren as Elizabeth II.

The opening encounter of the heavyweights takes place at Buckingham Palace, where Blair (Michael Sheen) kneels before the Queen (Helen Mirren) and is granted her permission to form a government. Blair and his wife, Cherie (Helen McCrory), being forbidden to turn their backs on the monarch, then leave the room in reverse, as if stepping gingerly away from a king cobra. There, in a single gesture, lies the conundrum of the movie. Do you (as Cherie Blair urges) sweep aside such ballyhoo as fast as possible, scorning it as the rusty detritus of deference? Or do you, as the Palace prefers, cling to every flourish of formality, from the bended knee to the state banquet, on the unquestioned ground that this is the way things have always been done? Or—and this is where the Prime Minister and the film itself reach toward a third, more quizzical option—do you, in the midst of your impatience with an encrusted élite, start to ask yourself what manner of cunning, even of wisdom, has led it to survive so long, and whether, on the sly, you might learn from its example? Also, what in heaven's name would

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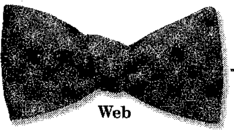

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take its place? In the words of Hilaire Belloc, "Always keep a-hold of Nurse, / For fear of finding something worse."

"The Queen" was written by Peter Morgan, who has become a specialist in fanciful reconstruction. His other works include a television play, "The Deal," directed by Frears, which examined the early balancing act between Blair and Gordon Brown, his probable successor, and "Frost/Nixon," a stage play, just ending a run at London's Donmar Warehouse, about the interviews that David Frost conducted with the growling former President in 1977. Michael Sheen also played Blair in the first of these, and Frost in the second. (He recently starred as the Emperor Nero in a drama on the BBC. Do I note a swelling theme?) Sheen is ideal for Morgan's purposes, in that he is engaged neither in exact facsimile nor, still less, in caricature. Both writer and actor, operating on the principle that well-known figures become less, not more, knowable with the passing of time, tend to fasten on what *can* be grasped—tics, expostulations, dates in a diary—and, thus armed, venture unabashed into speculation. I have no idea, for example, whether Blair actually threw poll statistics at Her Majesty over the phone, claiming that "seventy per cent of people believe that your actions have damaged the monarchy," but it sounds like the kind of thing that he (and he alone) would dare to say, braving the fact that, in earlier times, it would have led to ninety per cent of his body being sundered from the other ten.

As a director, Frears likes to stay on his feet, refusing to get bogged down in a dominant mood; his Roddy Doyle adaptations, "The Snapper" and "The Van," slip in and out of comedy as if rolling from one pub to the next. At the same time, there is, in Frears's homegrown work, an air of security—of shifting at his ease between familiar settings—that is never quite matched by his American projects, even in films as fruitful as "The Grifters" and "High Fidelity." And so it is with "The Queen," which bats back and forth between a variety of camps: the shabby, thrusting enclave of Downing Street, the magnificent starch of the Palace, and the tweed-and-tartan heartiness of Balmoral, the Highland fastness to which the Royal Family retreats at regular intervals, and where it holed up in the week after the car cra The Queen's decision to stay there a pull up the drawbridge, so to speak, v read by the public as evidence of a h heart, and Blair's success in persuadi her to return to London and address t nation on live TV was hailed as his fin hour. The movie digs up a news rep from CNN, in which the anchorwom suggests that the Royals failed to disp "enough remorse over Princess Dian death." A telling slip, throwing guilt the Palace and hoping it will stick.

I must admit that I crawled toward "T Queen" in glum trepidation. Given t chewed-over subject matter, not to me tion the tendency of the genre—a dr matic reheating of the recent past— curdle into kitsch, how could Frears ar his cast rise above the sins of the min series? One answer is the force of th cast, which features James Cromwell a Prince Philip, Roger Allam as Her Ma esty's Private Secretary, and Alex Jenning as Prince Charles—credit here to Dani Phillips, the makeup designer, who red dens the cheeks of the heir to the thron with the high choler of perpetual frustra tion. Then, there is Helen Mirren granted an unbeatable chance to expos the twin sides of her appeal: the warmt and the chill. How many actresses, sinc Dietrich and Bacall, have managed t make the forbidding seem so winning and vice versa? Mirren's figure is a touc too slim-waisted for the occasion, the Queen having settled into the comfortable build of late middle age, but padding would have been ungallant, and, if I was unable wholly to banish thoughts of Mirren cavorting bare as marble at the foot of a staircase in "Savage Messiah," Ken Russell's bio-pic of Gaudier-Brzeska, that is not Mirren's fault but mine, and she more than compensates with the heaviness of the royal gait, stumping across Balmoral in head scarf and brogues. Where Prunella Scales, in the film of Alan Bennett's "A Question of Attribution," brought out the consoling mundanity of the Queen ("Chicken," she says suddenly, when the name of Poussin is mentioned, adding, "One's just had it for lunch"), Mirren depicts a woman rendered ever more mysterious not just by unbreachably good manners but by all the secrets that she is known to possess, and from which she will never lift the veil.

The other thing that rescues and nes "The Queen" is one of the basic uses of moviegoing, more familiar te from documentaries like "Touch- the Void" and "Capturing the Fried- ns": you come out arguing. It should ossible to go to Frears's movie with iend, sit down to dinner, and declare, ell, *that* was the best advertisement republicanism ever made," only to d your friend convinced of the oppo- , viewing the monarchy, for all its ri- lity, as a bulwark against the cynical the of politics. If there is a shortcom- in "The Queen," it is that, in the e of compelling evidence, it main- ns too affectionate a gaze on human ture. For instance, Blair's press secre- y, Alastair Campbell, is played by ark Bazeley as a cocky rogue, thus issing the element of purebred mastiff his behavior. More important, the wspapers that Campbell harried and apped at were not so much pliable, nusing rags as carriers of plague. HOW US YOU CARE" is the headline on e *Daily Express* that we glimpse, up- de down, in passing. It was addressed the Queen, and in its blend of the ullying and the sentimental it perfectly istilled the decline, into anxious toxic- y, of a once confident land.

It is not, of course, the place of the ueen to comment on that festering, ut might it have been the duty of "The Queen"? How does one satirize a population? What I sensed, in the passing of Diana, was the rise of an alternative, hybrid deity. Call her Dianysus: the sacrificed goddess of love—"Queen of people's hearts," as she herself wished to be remembered, or "the people's Princess," as the Prime Minister tagged her, his spontaneous blessing nicely scripted, the movie suggests, by Campbell—was worshipped by an unreasoning throng that fed on its own distress. On the first evening after Diana's death, and again in subsequent days, I went down to Buckingham Palace, like an undercover Christopher Robin, and talked to the snaking lines of mourners. On TV, a well-known historian had suggested that, while Diana's plight and style had left a vivid symbolic imprint on British society, she herself had not been an especially gifted being. I found a pair of respectable middle-aged Englishwomen standing tearily in the Mall and asked if they had heard the historian's words. "Yes," one of them replied, "and if he shows his face down here I'll rip his fucking head off." Here was the new atavism—or, at any rate, the old earthen British fury, spreading into parts of the body politic that it had not previously touched. As in many a mob, the swell of shared emotion lay on the knife-edge of violence. No wonder the Queen stayed away. ♦

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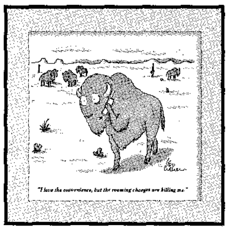
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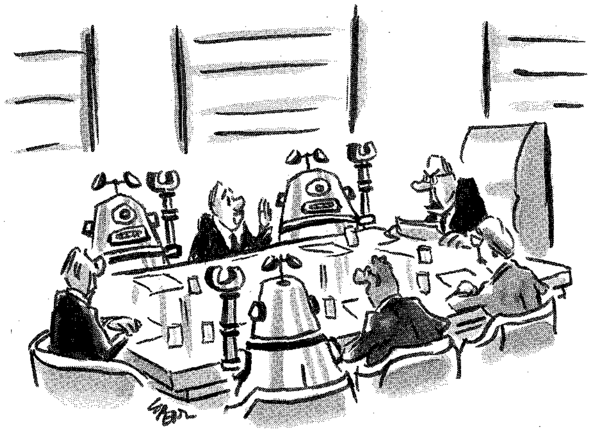
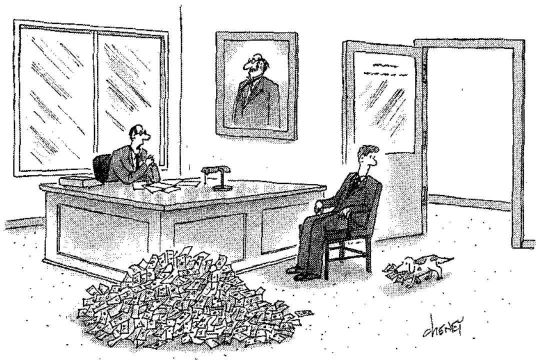
Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Mick Stevens, must be received by Sunday, October 8t Finalists in the September 25th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalis in this week's contest, in the October 23rd issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident ag eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Jenkins, if I want another yes-man I'll build one."
Brent Sheppard, Morganton, N.C.



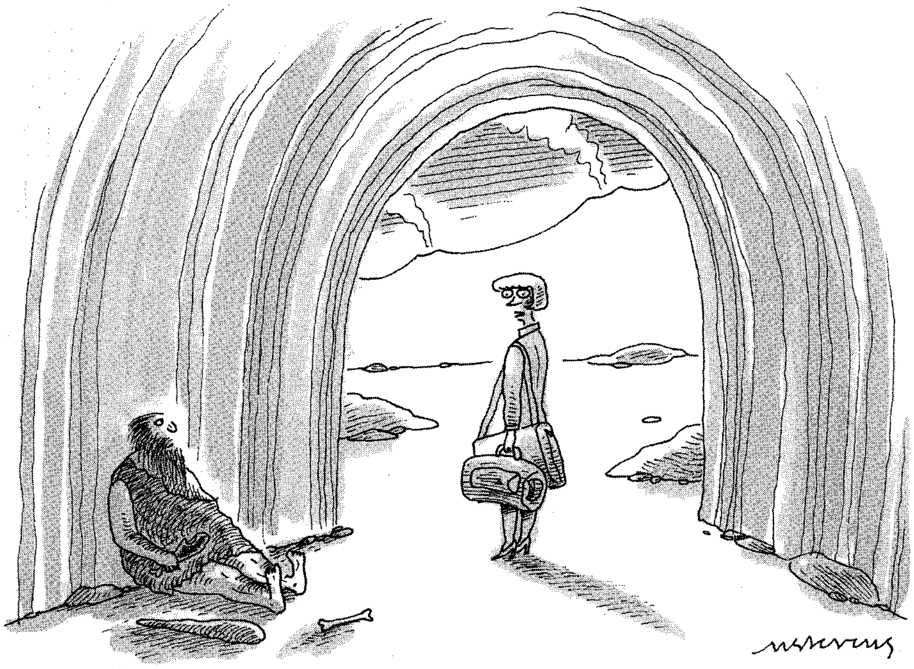
THE FINALISTS

"Don't laugh. He's made partner."
Jim Dickerson, Richmond, Va.

"He's a stray, but I'm thinking of keeping him."
Peter Fox, Oak View, Calif.

"There's no good way to tell you this, Carson—your job has been dogsourced."
Trent Wisecup, Birmingham, Mich.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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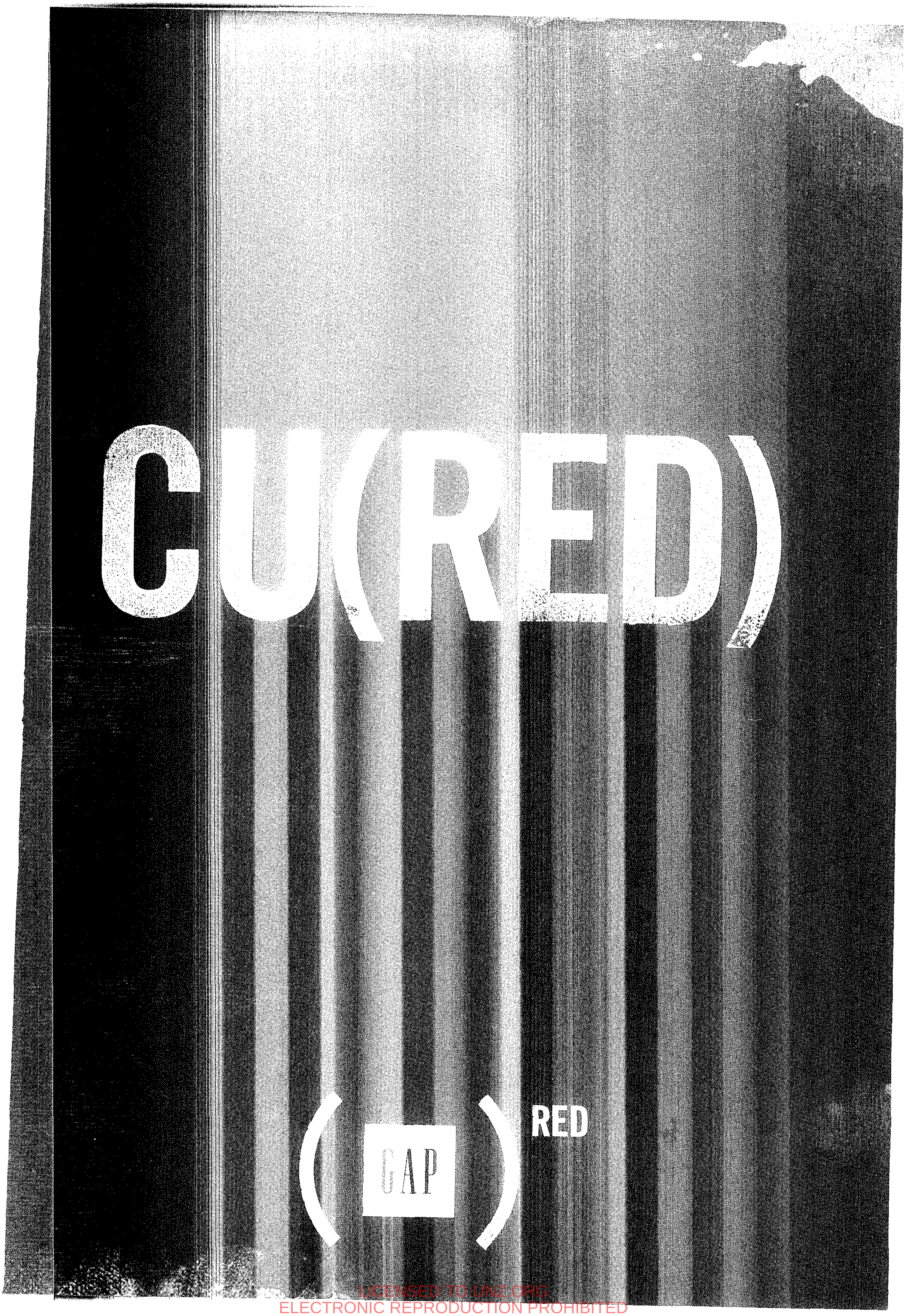
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